

## REPORT ON DEMOCRACY

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### SELECTING THE TOPIC

When the Academy started its work and we discussed possible topics, 'democracy' was soon sighted as a theme deserving priority. There were three mainlines of argumentation:

#### 1. *The Central and Complex Importance of 'Democracy' for Everybody's Life*

– That means: The fact that the democratic state is a product of all the individuals involved, just as their conditions of living and acting are a product of the law and the politics which they themselves create through 'their' state, 'their' government, 'their' courts, 'their' administrations, and 'their' army or police.

– But also the very different significance this word '*their*' has for the majority and the minority, for those who dominate (through money, media, religion, ethnicity etc.) and for those who do not, for the active and the passive participants.

#### 2. *The Manifold Changes in the Experience of 'Democracy'*

– The many histories of non-democratic (communist, fascist, authoritarian, colonial) regimes which since the end of World War II broke down and have embarked on the endeavour of 'democracy'.

– But also in longstanding democracies: The innovation of democratic rules, structures and procedures, of their use and their effects on the one hand – the fatigue of democratic traditions, the abuse of democratic structures and the decay of democratic morality on the other hand.

– Finally the growing dynamics of supranationality and internationality, and the competition and conflict between national, regional, continental and global systems of governance.

### 3. *Also the Distance Between the Tradition of the Catholic Social Doctrine and 'Democracy'*

– The relatively short history of a positive relationship between the Catholic Church and 'democracy' and a sometimes still reserved wording of the Church's social doctrine on 'democracy'.

– And the immense burden on the magisterium, which is asked to provide answers that are both valid for all of humanity and its global relations and institutions, as well as useful and convincing for the extremely different situations in potentially all states and regions of the earth.

– In any case: The relevance of the modern state and its democratic character for religious personalities, religious groups, Christians and non-Christians, the Christian communities and Christian churches.

#### THE WORK

The Academy's work on 'democracy' started in December 1996 with a *workshop*. The meeting pursued three aims:

– To lay a common basis of knowledge about the development of the Church's social doctrine on 'democracy'.

– To gain an overview of the very different situations of 'democracy' in the various continents and subcontinents.

– And to identify useful topics to approach the subject.

On this basis two *plenary meetings* dealt with 'democracy'.

The first plenary meeting took place in *April 1998*. It concentrated on three main themes:

– *Firstly: 'Democracy' and values*. Is 'democracy' itself a value? Is 'democracy' a means to materialise and to protect values? Or is it a danger for 'values'? Are values a precondition for 'democracy'?

– *Secondly*: What is the essence of '*civil society*'? What is the relation between 'democracy' and '*civil society*'?

– *Thirdly*: '*Democracy*' and supranationality; '*democracy*' and *internationality*.

The second plenary meeting took place in *February 2000*. Two of the subjects had to be elaborated more intensively:

– '*Democracy*' and *values*

– and the interplay between *democratic structures* and *civil society*.

Beyond that, a series of special topics had to be approached for the first time: education, public opinion and media, economy, labour, welfare state, ethnic structures, religion.

Then the Academy had to decide on *how to come to an end*. You have already been informed about our successful experiment with closing our project on 'labour'. As an alternative trial for 'democracy', three steps were planned.

– *First step*: Three *experts* were to evaluate the outcome of the Academy's meetings. They were not to be members of the Academy but specialists on Catholic Social Teaching. As the Academy, following its statutes, should 'offer the Church the elements which she can use in the development of her social doctrine', the experts were to design hypotheses on how such elements could be offered. The experts – that were: F. Sergio Bernal Restrepo (Rome), Professor Michael Novak (Washington), Professor Rudolf Weiler (Vienna) – presented their reports in spring 2002.

– *Second step*: During the *plenary meeting in April 2002*, a Final Discussion presented a comprehensive opportunity for integrating the results.

– *Third step*: A small working group of members of the Academy drafted a *Final Document*, which seeks to sum up the 'elements' which the Academy can offer the Church to be used 'in the development of her social doctrine'. That Final Document has been passed during this plenary meeting.

The entire proceedings will be published.

'ELEMENTS' OFFERED TO THE CHURCH TO BE USED 'IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HER SOCIAL DOCTRINE'

### *Democracy Is a Responsibility*

The Final Document starts with a central statement:

*'Democracy' denotes a central responsibility.*

*If there is no 'democracy'*, striving for 'democracy' may be a comprehensive way to improve human life. Or: if there are deficits in the recognition and implementation of social values, striving for 'democracy' may be the most effective way towards achieving the recognition and implementation of the denied social values.

In *present times* the majority of countries call themselves 'democratic' and even try to be 'democratic' in one way or another. *'Democracy' is a normality*. In so far, the 'normal' question is not to opt for or against 'democra-

cy', but rather to ask: '*what democracy?*' There are always differing opinions about what a 'true democracy' is. And there are always differences between the norms and institutions of a given 'democracy', and the reality of its practices and effects. Thus the *responsibility for understanding and implementing 'democracy' is crucial, even if a state is called a 'democracy', even if its government claims to be 'democratic', and if the people want to live in a 'democracy' and feel as if they do.*

*This responsibility is manifold.* It is the responsibility of those who run the state – the governmental and the legal machinery: the politicians, judges, other officials, experts and advisers. It is the responsibility of the whole civil society: of all individuals, all those who live in families, in groups, or act in organizations, of all leaders and all followers, especially all those who – for instance through the mass media – influence the attitudes and sentiments of others. And so it is a responsibility also of the Church.

#### *The Main Chapters of the Document*

The deliberations are subsumed under three chapters:

- Democracy: the value and the values;
- Democracy and civil society; and
- Democracy in the international and global context.

It is impossible to render a detailed account in the brief time available.

#### *The Unfinished Character of the Democratic Task*

But let me quote the closing remarks:

Democracy is a task. It will always be that. There is no ready, nor even an ultimate recipe for shaping a democratic state and handling democracy. Democracy will always remain unfinished. Catholic Social Teaching cannot finish it. That is true all the more as the Gospel is not a programme for governance and legislation. It is an inspiration. Catholic Social Teaching, however, can offer its assistance in mastering the unfinished task of democracy. It can transmit the direction and impetus coming from the Gospel into the reflections on and the practice of democracy. That includes the endeavour to approach the essentials of a perfect democracy as far as possible, but at the same time requires openness for the various forms and developments, watchfulness for their risks and opportunities, as well as creative sensitivity in seeking ways to minimise the risks and maximise the opportunities.