

# **THE PONTIFICAL COMMISSION JUSTICE AND PEACE RECEIVES A NEW CONSTITUTION**

## *The new Constitution*

Paul VI has given the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace a new constitution, and he has determined its mandate more precisely. After an experimental period of ten years it thus becomes a permanent body of the Holy See, having been confirmed according to the general norms governing the Roman Curia (*Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, art. 1).

The Commission was set up immediately after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council in response to a desire expressed in *Gaudium et Spes*, 90. It functioned during a first five-year period (1967-1971), and was renewed for a second experimental period. This latter period was first fixed for three years, then extended until the Holy Year 1975, and finally prolonged until there would be a further decision. The Commission came into being together with the *Consilium de Laicis* and as its twin organization. Hence both were set up by the same *Motu Proprio* (*Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*, 6 January 1967), and united under the same presidency. Now, with the *Motu Proprio* *Justitiam et Pacem*, the Pontifical Commission receives its own definitive character which, it can be said, brings it to maturity among the organizations of the Holy See.

Like the Departments, the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace is composed in its structure of members and consultors, who are named by the Holy Father. The members are Cardinals, Bishops, other ecclesiastics and lay persons who continue to exercise their ministry and their respective professions. Chosen from every part of the world, from different cultures, from diverse surroundings and roles in society and in the Church, they ensure for the Commission an efficient living contact with the realities of history and with current problems. They assemble in periodic general meetings, in order to contribute through their specialized knowledge and pastoral experience to outlining the work of the Commission. Consultors, both ecclesiastics and lay persons, are also appointed by the Holy Father, in virtue of their competence in

the area of the Church's social thought and action; they will frequently be consulted in writing on matters pertaining to their competence, or they will be requested to participate in study groups.

### *The mandate*

Even though the structure of the Commission is similar to that of other bodies of the Holy See, the mandate assigned to it makes it differ substantially from the Curial Departments. It has as its aim to awaken the sensitivity, conscience and concern of the People of God — both individuals and institutions — so that they may fully respond to their mission of serving the cause of justice and peace in the world.

It therefore does not have a juridical or administrative task giving it an exclusive competence of a juridical nature for determined geographical areas, for various categories of persons or for certain types of problems. It has rather the task of attentive listening, of study, of proclamation and encouragement, wherever justice and peace find their vital dimension.

It is in fact in all sectors of society that it is necessary to promote justice and peace, so that the light and leaven of the Gospel will penetrate into each of its parts.

The pressing needs that have marked the origin of the Commission (justice for poor countries, international peace: cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 90) continue to exist: they are not superseded as the perspectives widen. On the contrary, the experience of the Commission in its experimental period and the results of the recent great international discussions show all the more how realistic programmes for the development of poor peoples and the establishment of a new international order create the obligation to re-examine in depth all aspects of the life of society and the life of both rich and poor nations.

In determining the areas of action of the Commission, the *Motu Proprio Justitiam et Pacem* several times mentions justice, the development of peoples, human advancement, peace and human rights.

Insistence on the problem of offences against justice and of violations of human rights is particularly significant (cf. II, 6). The problem unfortunately is a sad reality in many parts of the world. Various years of experience have led the Commission, in contact with the national Commissions, to devote an important part of its energies to this question. An example of this is its publica-



tion "The Church and Human Rights", which came out a year ago and which gathers the fruit of study and offers helpful pastoral suggestions to the local Churches.

In this field, what is asked of the Commission is to emphasize the specific contribution of the Church. As Paul VI has recalled in his Pastoral Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the Church's action for justice is inserted in the context of her evangelizing mission. This explains the insistence on the doctrinal, pastoral and evangelizing aspects.

### *Methodology*

In its methodology of action, the Pontifical Commission works according to different phases. They are: attentive listening, the gathering and analysis of data, an examination made in the light of the Gospel and of the teaching of the Church, fruits of reflection, suggestions and incentives for action.

This attitude of attentive listening, which the Second Vatican Council has so forcefully evoked in *Gaudium et Spes* (particularly in the introduction), must continue to be a characteristic of the Church, so that she may be truly present in today's world. Such an attitude of openness and receptivity is formally required of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace. The *Motu Proprio* says that it is necessary for the members of the Commission to be constantly attentive to what is happening in the sectors of their competence, and to what people are looking for in these areas, in accordance with various times and circumstances. The document likewise says that the Commission must synthesize studies referring to the development of peoples, peace, justice, and human rights, under the cultural, moral, educational, economic and social aspects. A particular emphasis is placed on this phase of the study.

But in order that this work may be truly Christian, the Commission is called to study all the human situations in the light of the Gospel and in fidelity to the Church's Magisterium. The study must be done in theological depth and must be linked with the living tradition of the Church in the matter of reflection and of social action. It is not a question of lazily repeating the past but of evoking new fruits from that tradition and of collaborating for the evolution of the social thinking of the Church. This is to be done in the perspective mentioned by Paul VI in *Octogesima Adveniens*, 42: "It is with all its dynamism that the social teaching of the Church accompanies men in their search. If it does not intervene to authenticate a given structure or to propose a ready-

made model, it does not thereby limit itself to recalling general principles. It develops through reflection applied to the changing situations of this world, under the driving force of the Gospel . . ."

For the concrete effectiveness of its work, the Pontifical Commission must make known the results of its studies, its work of documentation and its reflection to all the parts of the Church that are concerned in them. These results should contribute to enlightening the People of God and to encouraging them so that they may attain full awareness in the areas of their obligations for a truly Christian life.

Hence the last work phase of the Commission is providing incentive and animation for action, and above all pastoral action in the Church, within a pastoral perspective of evangelization.

#### *Those with whom the Pontifical Commission collaborates*

These interlocutors are grouped in three categories. It is interesting to note that the *Motu Proprio* speaks at the beginning of regular and organic contacts with the Episcopal Conferences: this emphasizes the role of animation in regard to the entire Church. By means of the Episcopal Conferences and in accord with them, the Commission works with all the active forces which on the level of research or of action are concerned with the same problems and which are in communion with the Episcopate (according to different statutes which are determined or approved by the Conferences themselves). Where national Justice and Peace Commissions exist, it is natural that they should be privileged interlocutors, but they are not parts or national sections of the Pontifical Commission. Their statutes, which differ according to countries and circumstances, are determined or approved by the Episcopal Conferences themselves, inasmuch as these national Commissions are bodies of the local Churches.

A second group of interlocutors is made up of the Departments of the Roman Curia, in so far as their work, under various aspects, is connected with problems of justice and peace. The relationship with the Secretariat of State is particularly evident, because by reason of *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae* the Secretariat of State has a general coordinating function, and various areas of the Commission work have repercussions in the sphere of the Secretariat of State's competence.

A third group of interlocutors is formed by groups and different institutions within the Church (Religious Orders, International

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Catholic Organizations, etc.) and by groups and individuals outside the Church that make a contribution to the realization of the same aims, and with which the Curial Departments normally have relationships. There is also a clear ecumenical dimension that extends also to the sphere of non-Christians.

### *Immense task*

An immense task is thus entrusted to the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace. It is a task that must be fulfilled within a perspective of attentiveness and of openness to a world where the continuous and rapid changes of relations between individuals and peoples constantly bring forth new problems or reveal new aspects of problems. It is a task which is a true evangelical witness which embraces fidelity to the rich and living tradition proposed by the Magisterium of the Church, and which is an action directed towards inspiring continual progress and renewal. It is a task which shows a concern for assisting and serving the entire People of God in their commitment to justice and peace.