

THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH IN INDIA (General Introduction)

John Desrochers

About 15 months ago, I read at a stretch the book of Donald De Souza, which contains the 19 *Final Statements of the General Body Meetings of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) (1966-2002)*. I also went through the 2004 CBCI Statement. This strengthened my conviction that **the Church constitutes a thought-provoking and relevant partner to dialogue on social issues**. The Bishops' reflections indeed contain many enlightening passages which deserve to be better known, critically analysed and seriously implemented. **Though a minority, the Church in India should make a much more significant contribution to social justice and structural change**. *Unfortunately, her documents are hardly known and still less implemented, even among Christians.*

I therefore felt it was worthwhile to write a study of **The Social Teaching of the Church in India** for the readers of the review *Integral Liberation* and many others as well. Several Christians and people of other faiths and worldviews could then become more aware of what the leaders of the Church said on crucial social issues. *They could also reflect together on these teachings and complement them, and thus sharpen their understanding and reorient their involvements*. This study could even challenge the Church or at least many of her members, dioceses and organisations, and several other individuals, action groups and people's movements *to become better organised and more effective*.

When the idea of publishing a special number of *Integral Liberation* was accepted, it was decided to include an article on the Social Teaching of the 'Protestant' Churches and to integrate some reflections from the 1991-2005 *Final Statements* of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), Latin Rite. (We did not however succeed to do the same for the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara

Rites.) We even wanted to consider the proposals of the Conference of Religious India (CRI), but the scope would have become too broad. Later on, Fr. Thomas D'Sa and Fr. R.K. Samy, the NBCLC Director and Assistant Director, wholeheartedly agreed to include this book in the NBCLC series on *India's Social Challenges*. Meanwhile, the Editorial Board of *Integral Liberation* and about 10 other intellectuals and activists went through large parts of this book and made several useful suggestions to improve its content and presentation. **I sincerely thank them.**

In **Part One**, Sunil M. Caleb focuses on the Social Thought of the Quadrennial Assemblies of the **National Council of Churches in India** (NCCI), since this body is quite representative of the Protestant Churches. He interestingly relates the NCCI declarations to actual events in the life of the world and country. In **Part Two**, I systematically analyse the **Final Statements of the CBCI General Assemblies** from 1966 to 2004. The study adopts a *thematic approach*, but usually follows the chronological order within each theme. Some statements of the CCBI are also taken into account, almost always at the end of the sections. We hope that this study, with its *Suggestions for Further Readings, Questions for Personal Reflection and Group Sharing, Prayers for Social Change, and Index (Selected Issues)*, will constitute a **helpful resource book**.

The main purpose of this book is not simply to make the Social Teaching of the Church (STC) better known. **It is rather to promote its implementation**, thus remedying what is probably its greatest defect. **It is even to try to ensure its relevant development and implementation in the future by proposing some effective means and structures**. *We will therefore dialogue with the STC, reflect on the vital issues facing today's world and India, and learn how to respond better to the existing challenges. We will thus hopefully deepen our commitment to transform society and build a more just and fraternal world. The main purpose of this book is to strengthen the movement to this effect, both within and outside the Church. May this book help many Christians and people of goodwill to contribute to make the Church in India (and the Universal Church) more relevant, and even more, to transform our country and the world.*