

**The Common Good in An Unequal World:
A Conference on the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church**

Thursday 2nd March, 2006

Short Opening Address
Archbishop Seán Brady

Your Eminence, Your Excellency, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Irish Bishops' Conference may I echo Bishop Field's words of welcome to you all and thank you for taking this time out of your busy schedules to reflect on the implications of the publication of this providential gift to the Church in our time, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

A very special word of thanks also to our speakers, to An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern who will join us shortly, to Lord Patten of Barnes, to Nuala O'Loan the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, to David Begg General Secretary of ICTU and to the two panels of experts from the Irish Commission of Justice and Social Affairs who will be chaired by Dr John Bowman in the afternoon. A very warm word of welcome also to the representatives of the other Churches, ecclesial communities and faith traditions who are with us and to the various representatives of political parties, NGO's and voluntary organisations. Together we represent a very wide range of backgrounds and activities which converge in our commitment to the peace and well-being of our society. I hope that today's events will help to strengthen us all in our commitment to that task and to deepening what the Compendium so aptly describes as our shared humanism, based on solidarity.

On behalf of the Irish Bishops' Conference I would like to express our particular appreciation to his Eminence Cardinal Renato Martino for honouring us with his presence here today. No stranger to Ireland, it was under Cardinal Martino's careful direction that the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace published this historic compendium in October 2004, thereby completing a project initiated by our late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II. Your Eminence it is a great pleasure to have you with us here and we look forward to benefiting from your insights into the great treasure which has been bequeathed to us in the social doctrine of the Church.

It is most appropriate of course that this Conference is held at the beginning of the season of Lent. As the ashes were placed on our forehead yesterday, we were reminded that the Christian journey is one of continual transformation, of *metanoia*, of making all things new. The source and challenge of that transformation is both external and internal. It is of immense significance to all of those who seek to be more than social engineers in the search for justice and peace, that Jesus located the prospect of the civilisation of love in a radical change of attitude – in the Beatitudes – the attitudes of the truly happy. As anyone who has sought to resolve conflict through threat of force or even legal agreement will know, as anyone who has sought to mobilise people to the concerns of the poor and hungry of our world will know, or as those who sought engage societies of busy people in concern for the sustainability of or environment will know, the best thought out policies, the most comprehensives agreements will all flounder without a fundamental change of attitude.

The Beatitudes, which we will pray in song in a moment, touch on all of the great journeys of transformation which open for us the possibility and the vision of a civilisation of love. At

their heart, as our Conference theme suggests, is 'is the firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are really responsible for all.' The beatitudes remind us how quickly the legitimate pursuit of personal or national economic growth can become separated from its proper orientation towards the common good and from the principle of the universal destiny of the goods of the earth. There is ample evidence in our own society that the richer we get, the more inclined we are to think of compassion, aid and the selfless service of others as luxury items, things to be considered only when every thing else is paid for and done.

This suggests, at least in part, that the shift to a more global consciousness has not yet been met with a shift towards a more global conscience, that we are still inclined to look after our own interests first, both as individuals and as nation states.

And this brings us back to our Lenten journey, to those simple ashes which remind us so publicly of our shared humanity, based on solidarity.

As we gather today to reflect on more intensely on the implications of that innate solidarity, let us ask the Lord to deepen our transformation and to help to make that civilisation of love which he proclaimed, a more transparent and tangible reality in our world and in all its dimensions.

Let us pray: