

LEGACY

In 12 years, Francis erased Church's social doctrine

ECCLESIA

23_04_2025



**Stefano
Fontana**



Looking at the changes that have taken place in the last 12 years, it is impossible not to notice that during Francis' pontificate the Church's social doctrine (SDC) fell into disuse. Not only is the term no longer used, nor are its principles and criteria for assessing the

many new social phenomena, but above all its philosophical and theological foundations were erased, without which it is reduced to social moralism and general humanist solidarity. The framework of these foundations had held together, albeit with some difficulty, until Benedict XVI, but then much was lost and those who had cultivated their commitment to the SDC were severely tested. At a certain point, what had been said and done before could no longer be said or done. Overnight a new pattern was imposed.

The main assumption of this framework is the correct relationship between the natural and the supernatural, and therefore between reason (including political reason) and religious faith. It is well known that the theology of the Pontifical Universities no longer uses these words with their metaphysical flavour, which have now been replaced by a much more wordly historical and existential perspective. Without them, however, the SDC becomes impossible, that is, God's gaze on the human community, with all its salvific needs, which encounters, strengthens and purifies the truths of political reason. The SDC must be based on the Word of Christ the Saviour and also on the truth of natural reason, which ultimately comes from Christ the Creator.

The SDC must be based on a natural and final order which is inherent in the social nature of mankind and which, in spite of the fallen state resulting from sin, is capable of reaching the preambles of faith, so that the Word can express itself in an intelligible language. This natural, final order contains the principles of social and political morality, confirmed by Revelation and protected by the Church, without which there would be no SDC, because the concept of the common good and the basis of political authority would be lacking. The SDC needs natural law and natural morality.

In this pontificate, however, these concepts have not been taken up again.

Natural law and natural morality have not been invoked. The non-negotiable principles that flow from natural law have been denied and forgotten. A Church has been proposed that is inclusive of all behaviour, according to which there is only being and no more ought to be, since God loves us not only as we are but also as we remain, a Church that does not judge historical events but merely accompanies them. A Church that refers only to mercy, neglecting truth, is out of step with the demands of the SDC, which is to judge history and the world in the light of natural reason and revelation.

This absence of the perspective of natural law is also evident in documents that are not strictly social or political in nature. The new interpretation of adultery in *Amoris laetitia* does not take into account that it violates natural law and not only divine law. The blessing of homosexual couples in *Fiducia supplicans* forgets that natural reason

itself, before the norms of the Gospel, says that they are not couples at all. Such disregard for the natural order has repercussions for the SDC, which bases society on the family and marriage. The openness to the legal recognition of civil unions, including homosexual ones, directly expressed by Francis himself, and the encouragement of movements in favour of transgenderism, have weakened, if not made impossible, the coherence between faith and politics on which the SSC is based. Never before, as in this pontificate, have the lay faithful felt so uncomfortable about no longer being organically guided and formed in their engagement with the world.

If we examine Francis' interventions on social moral issues, we see that he has always addressed everyone indiscriminately, never Catholics and believers. His speeches to popular movements of various kinds, his direct interventions to globalist foundations, his messages to movements for "new rights"... have never spoken of Christ. Addressed to everyone without distinction, with a broad and inclusive approach, these interventions were therefore on a purely human level. John Paul II wrote in *Centesimus Annus* that the SDC was the proclamation of Christ in temporal realities and that its purpose was evangelisation, of which it was an instrument. None of this is to be found in the pontificate of Francis, during which evangelisation has been excluded as a form of proselytism and Christians have been asked to care for the poor, but no longer to build the society whose architectural criteria are preserved in the SDC.

The principles and criteria of the DSC have never been applied to the major processes underway in our societies, such as the Covid, immigration, the environment and European unification. Instead, it has been preferred to intervene on a case-by-case basis, asking questions rather than giving answers, favouring a discernment of conscience that is lost without doctrine, proposing the Church as a companion and no longer as a guide. Thus, in the end, the Church has been absent on the major issues mentioned above, and has ended up flattening itself against the strongest currents of the prevailing globalism. What is more, it was happy to be absent, considering this position to be more "evangelical".

Some might remind us that Francis also wrote two encyclicals considered to be of a social nature, *Laudato si'* (18 June 2015) and *Fratelli tutti* (3 October 2020). How can it be said that he has neglected the SDC? *Laudato si'*, unlike previous encyclicals, is dedicated to a sectoral theme, the environment; it was written, by Francis' own admission, by Leonardo Boff; much of its text is taken up by clichés of environmentalism dear to the regime's press; there are serious concessions to the view of man as part of a greater Mother Earth and to economic forms such as happy degrowth, already criticised by Benedict XVI. This encyclical is responsible for the 'ecological delirium' of many

Bishops' Conferences and Christian communities, and their alignment with the plans of the world's leaders in this regard. As far as *Fratelli tutti* are concerned, the encyclical claims that the fraternity of men is based not on their common human nature as the fruit of creation and their election as children of the Father, but on being "in the same boat", that is, on a purely existential solidarity. These two encyclicals cannot be considered in continuity with the whole tradition of the SDC.