

## Meeting with HG Archbishop Charles Scicluna Ethics and Morality in Public Life

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### By Steering Committee

The Malta chapter of *Fondazione Centesimus Annus* expresses its gratitude to His Grace for kindly welcoming us.

We have requested this meeting with the purpose of sharing our preoccupations and soliciting your guidance on our possible contribution to strengthening a commitment to ethics and morality in public life in Malta today. In doing so, we have taken comfort and inspiration from the Independence Day Homily on the transcendental values that must underpin good governance and from your timely warnings on the effects of unchecked materialism.

As Catholic citizens, we believe that bringing moral convictions into public life does not threaten pluralism or democracy but enriches them and the country. We believe that the separation of Church and State does not require us to separate our beliefs from our public actions, and that whatever our walk of life, an authentic life of faith can only contribute to the common good. Economic growth is necessary but not sufficient to our progress as a country; we believe that growth as an unexamined good - both in terms of the means and ends of growth - will only further exacerbate cultural and spiritual poverty.

We are preoccupied about the apparent moral vacuum that prevails in public life today. The globalised indifference of which Pope Francis has spoken appears to have hit our shores too, as people's worlds have grown more narrow, more private and apparently unconcerned with values and standards in public life. While the financial and economic crisis served to weaken people's faith in institutions, the steady decline in levels of transparency and trust that we have seen locally has also served to fuel public scepticism, even cynicism, about the prospect of servant leadership. This is exacerbated by the disrepute that has fallen upon a number of our key institutions which appear occasionally prone to pressures of 'fear or favour'. We sense not only an apathy, but even an antipathy, to entering public life. This, together with a growing immunity to scandal and failure to discern between right or wrong, between means and ends, causes us great concern.

It is not only in the political sphere that we have concerns. In social life, a reluctance to engage with issues of fundamental importance to public morality is evident in the generally silent complacency of the unions and constituted bodies in cases, for instance, of opaque political decisions and environmental degradation. With few exceptions, the media are seen to place political loyalties above truth and above their role of bravely challenging society and its institutions to pursue the common good. Often intemperate blogs are filling a vacuum and further consolidating social divisions. Civil society, too, is increasingly divided on matters that have always been a source of unity and of fundamental importance to Maltese society, for instance, the protection of life in all stages, promoting the natural structure of the family, and upholding the rights of parents to educate their children.

Despite this bleak picture of a downwards spiral, we believe that there is much to encourage us too. The decency of the silent majority; families who strive to do their utmost by each other; the thousands of young people who are active in the voluntary sector; vibrant parishes that provide belonging, support and guidance to so many; and some NGOs that make a true and lasting impact.

As FCA, we would like to contribute to regenerate a sense of common good in public life, and to help restore hope in the possibility of such a shared endeavour. We have already done a bit. Various courses have been organised, on Ethics in Business and on Politics and the Common Good, which will be repeated this year. We have held well-attended seminars on various Encyclicals and are engaging also with school children on responsible consumption.

We would like to do more, and would like to take this opportunity to discuss possible ideas with you, for instance, how we might work through the media to rekindle hope and to affirm the transcendental values of which you spoke in the Independence Day homily, illustrating how these have been exemplified in the lives of various Maltese personalities in modern history. We would also like to discuss the possibilities of mobilising, through the parishes, the witness of active Christians in the various media. We are also actively considering bilateral meetings with political parties to engage in debate on governance for the common good.

While these are only our preliminary ideas, we would be most grateful for your insight and guidance on how we may most usefully contribute to Maltese society as concerned citizens and members of FCA.