

S.E. George Cardinal Pell:

Thank you Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen: I appreciate the invitation to say something about lay people and money and participation in the Church.

If I could go back quite a way to about 1867, there was a controversy then about the role of lay people in the Church, and Cardinal Newman, the distinguished English convert theologian, had written a book on consulting the laity. There was an English official here, very close to Pius IX, who said "What is the province of the laity? To hunt, to shoot, to entertain. These are the matters they understand". He said "Dr. Newman is the most dangerous man in England and you will see that he will make use of the laity against Your Grace".

Now I suspect that most of the laity would be only too happy to hunt, shoot and entertain if they could afford to do so, but that is not according to the New Testament perspectives and it is certainly not something that follows from the Second Vatican Council.

In the old Canon Law there was very little written about the roles of lay people. There were 2.414 canons and only 44 had anything to do with lay people. You might say, Well, that is a big blessing, and it is not too bad a situation at all. But when the Second Vatican Council came along they had to debate the document on the Church.

I remember, as a young seminarian here in Rome at the time, coming from the old world of thinking that it was a great surprise to us when the Council began by speaking first of all on the mystery of the Church and then on the people of God and then only later on the hierarchy. So this represented in Church thinking, something like a Copernican revolution.

I think it was Newman who said "The Church would look very silly without lay people." Because the overwhelming majority of people in the Church are constituted by their baptism. So I remember in the past that people would sometimes say to me "When did you join the Church?", meaning

when did I enter the Seminary or when was I ordained, and I would sometimes, or regularly, disconcert them by saying "I joined the Church at baptism."

The role of the lay people according to the Second Vatican Council was to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them to the plan of God. And it was Pope Paul VI who said that the lay people were to be "a bridge to the world, the salt of the earth".

The role of the lay people is to take Christian influence into areas where the clergy cannot go. So the role of the lay people is, to go back to a local example, is not to take over the parish finances, to sideline the parish priest and control the life of the parish. There should be parish councils: there certainly should be dialogue, cooperation. I think priestly leadership in a parish is necessary. Episcopal leadership is necessary in the diocese.

But, you see, the currents – at least in the Western world – are running strongly against Christian living. In most parts of the Western world the Catholic community is in decline. It is not true in Africa, it is not true in Asia, certainly in China. It is different again in South America, but we are in decline. People are disaffiliating, people are ceasing to practice, the religious level of enthusiasm for young people is less percentage-wise than it is for older people. And the temptation is to take refuge from the world in the small world of Church affairs.

Your contribution to the running of parishes, dioceses, hospitals, schools, welfare agencies, the proper financial running of these institutions is absolutely essential today. And overwhelmingly, because of our life of service in the Church, we clerics simply do not have that high level of expertise or experience that can only come from highly competent and dedicated professionals, with decades of experience in the world of finance working together with the clergy.

There are many, many other things that might be said on that particular point, but I thought I would say a few words, even more basically, because I never anticipated that I would be spending most of my time

working with money. As they say in show business, it is my last gig! I am moving towards retirement.

I am slightly scandalized by the fact that I find it so interesting! (*laughter*) But I believe very strongly that we must order our affairs well; we must be a good example to people outside. I believe that as a diocesan bishop I had an obligation to conserve the patrimony I had received and handed on to my successor. And the world – especially those who are hostile to Christianity, will be looking for every mistake we make in the administration of money. In many parts of the world we have had great sadness with the pedophilia crisis. In many parts I think the worst is behind us. I think that people will be searching to make the next wave of attacks on financial maladministration.

So when I thought about this I thought I will go back to the New Testament and see what Jesus had to say about money. And it is very interesting, and it should be consoling to you as I will try to exemplify. Jesus understood money. To go a little bit out of sequence, I think the parable of the talents shows that.

The man who had one talent, he did not throw it away, or waste it. He just buried it. He did not use it, he did not get any interest on it, and Our Lord did not say “Oh well, that’s not too bad. You could have done a bit better.” He was quite cross with him. Now, it was financial example about the way we should use the strengths we have, the talents we have, but nonetheless it is important.

One of the great strengths of Pope Francis is that he lives his vow of Jesuit poverty very seriously. And this is received very, very well by the world, and he is very serious about us helping the world materially. But we can’t do that if we have no money or expertise or access to funds.

So you all remember the parable of the rich young man who wanted to know what he needed to do to follow God properly and achieve eternal life. He already followed the commandments. Our Lord said that was terrific. And then He said, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell your

possessions and give the proceeds to the poor." And the young man was like most of us, and he said "I don't think I can manage that", as he was very rich.

And then Jesus went on with these astounding lines to say that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. Now once upon a time I used to think that Peter and the Apostles were poor, but almost certainly they were not. They were very successful fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. They were successful small business men. I have got no doubt that Peter led his cooperative or his company.

So they said to Jesus, But what about us. We might not be the Rockefellers, but we have got good businesses and no doubt they were using that to help support Jesus. And Our Lord said, "what might be impossible to men is possible to God".

Then we have the woes, the terrible woes, and the Beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit". Blessed are the poor, then the terrible woes, especially for those who are rich; "you are having your consolation now". Around the Vatican a lot of people sleep out at night, and most of them do not want to go into our shelters. But there is one who always sleeps outside my door. So I am well aware of the stories of Dives and Lazarus. How in this life Lazarus was outside covered in sores and Dives wasn't the slightest bit interested in him, so I make it my business to give some little thing regularly to the poor fellow who sleeps outside my door. So should we all.

We are told not to store up treasures for ourselves on earth but to store up treasures in heaven where they cannot be destroyed by moth or woodworm. Jesus knew the power of money to fascinate, corrupt and capture the human heart. And what is true I think is everyone, especially those of us tied up with money, has to choose what is our first priority: we have to choose God or money. You cannot be the slave of two masters: you cannot be the slave both of God and money. I was surprised, perhaps

shocked, when I heard that Mother Teresa said that for clergy there are two great temptations: she said sex and money. And she said money is the greater temptation of those two.

That was a surprise to me. Perhaps now it is less of a surprise than it was. Jesus drew on unexpected figures and activities for his teaching. He praised the unjust steward for his astuteness because he realized that he was in trouble, and he acted, and used money, that tainted thing, to help make his way.

We have to be open of heart: Jesus had wealthy friends; Mary, Martha and Lazarus, almost certainly by the standards of the time, they were wealthy, and He was their friend. And Joseph of Arimathea, who arranged His burial. And so I think what is important, and in some countries the Church is rich, we have to use what wealth we have for good purposes, and especially for the poor, the suffering and for human development.

I was trying to persuade an Archbishop to give money for some good purpose, and he was saying "Oh, Erm", and I said I could remember a young auxiliary bishop who used to rebuke me and tell me that the only reason we had money in our diocese was to use it for good purposes. And he said "Yes, that is right." And of course he was the man who was rebuking me.

Jesus was a friend of Zacchaeus, the tax collector. He went to dine with him. I often quote Margaret Thatcher: the story about the Good Samaritan. She said if the Good Samaritan did not have any capital he could not have left the money there to look after the man who was robbed. And there is no escaping that logic.

I have to wind up: my time is running out. Jesus' teaching is different from the Old Testament's teaching on wealth. In the Old Testament, wealth was regarded as a sign of God's blessing. So with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and even Job, who, after all his terrible times, returned to prosperity. It was like the situation in pagan Greece and in Rome. Wealth

was some evidence of nobility or God's approval. Jesus put the accent in entirely different directions.

In some very real sense, wealth is a hindrance, a difficulty. It can harden our hearts of course. And greed is a very real thing, and original sin exists right across every section of the Christian people. And greed can even be present in clergy, who have no money or grandchildren to pass it on to, but can be fascinated by money.

"Blessed are you who are poor. The Kingdom of God is yours." These were revolutionary concepts. So they are very basic concepts. While I very much believe in the vocation of the entrepreneur, I believe that we need to create wealth work, improve education and health care.

I agree with the late -Father Andrew Greeley, an American sociologist and novelist, theologian and writer from Chicago, who said that there is no chance of us all living like Francis of Assisi; the economy would collapse, and we don't want that. But as followers of Jesus we have to take all his teachings seriously.
