

**Paper drafted by the Basilicata group on the theme:**

**An urgent message to the contemporary world: can Catholic Social Doctrine be spread also among non Christians?**

To start with, a few words on the respective merit of the three themes which the conference addresses and the reasons which made us choose the third one. Though all three themes are extremely topical, we felt the first one addressed a long term issue since it advocates profound structural changes to the present setup. As for the second one, a careful analysis would have implied medium term considerations, given the complex relationship between an overly sluggish job creation and the extremely rapid changes caused by the digital revolution. On the other hand the third theme, already defined in its formulation as “urgent message to the contemporary world” is of stringent and absolute topicality, especially if we keep in mind the history of the Foundation and of the conference itself.

In fact the question about “the diffusion of Catholic Social Teachings also among non Christians” implies a strong affirmative answer, and therefore a strong committed engagement by the Christian community. Of course, if we confined ourselves to the opposite formulation “the diffusion of Catholic Social Teachings among Christians is possible” there would be innumerable examples to support it. As a matter of fact if we look at the historical implementation of this doctrinal corpus in the century that goes from *Rerum Novarum* to *Centesimus Annus* there is not only an uninterrupted sequence of papal encyclicals that unequivocally emphasize the same message. There is also an extraordinary explosion of thoughts and actions – not so much within the Church but within the wider context of civil society – which evidence the birth of a modern Catholic political message capable of translating into active historical and social presence. If at philosophical level it is French Catholicism that leads the way (think of the two cultural pillars of Mounier’s communal personalism and Maritain’s integral humanism) it is in Italy – after WWII and in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – that we see the birth of the “party of Catholics” which goes under the name of Democrazia Cristiana.

Skipping altogether the chapter of 19<sup>th</sup> century integralism, the fifty years of demochristian rule are mentioned here only to trace the peculiar origin of this experience: the Camaldoli Code of 1943. And at least passing reference should be made to the Social Code of Malines (Belgium) and a “school of thought” (France 1830 to 1848) which – generating a lively corpus of surveys, proposals, social and economic initiatives of Catholics active in politics or simply in cultural movements – “was first one of the causes and then the effect of *Rerum Novarum*” (Emilio Taviani). The debate was between one side which opted for “coordinating in some way the tenets of liberal economics with the principles of Christian sociology”, and the opposite one which criticized and

repudiated “both Marxist collectivism and liberal capitalism” with arguments that remained valid until the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989.

This description is dated and marginally incorrect but can be rendered extremely topical by mentioning another significant date: 2007. Only seven years ago we found ourselves at the beginning of the greatest economic crisis in history, whose devastating social effects are still evident. Without going back too far, a recent article (February 27, 2015, Aniello Tortora) reads: “The Christian community is responsible for denouncing problems and offering useful contribution to their solution. But it is the political class who is responsible for actually solving the social problems afflicting the country.... The Church cannot be the perennial nurse of history”.

The article is fine but, if it is not the Church’s responsibility to solve those problems, what are “politically, socially or only culturally active” Catholics expected to do? This question cannot be answered with indifference or actual disengagement. As the above article reads : “The Christian community is responsible for denouncing problems and offering useful contribution to their solution”. But “are Catholic politicians part of the Christian community or not?” Since the answer can only be positive, what can their contribution be – at least a cultural one - to a commitment that could be defined Catholic or at a minimum of Christian inspiration? Ultimately, which is the “problem of problems”?

As a first step let us get rid of an issue that today looks insignificant: Catholic vote going to a plurality of political parties and the consequent dispersion of the presence of Catholics in the political arena. In other words the end of “one party for Catholic voters” as represented by the demochristian experience. It was a consequence of the so called “socialist choice” made by the ACLIs (*Catholic Associations of Italian Workers*) at the 1979 Vallombrosa Conference and their repudiation of “electoral collateralism” to the demochristian party. This Catholic “diaspora” must be judged within a precise context: Catholic Social Teachings as preached by practicing Catholics faced an audience characterized by a potential “absence of Christian Faith”. In such a context what was to be done? In the same circumstances, at the end of WWII, CGIL (*communist trade union*) momentarily united all unionized workers at the risk of becoming a mere tool of the Communist party.

At the time a solution to this regrettable situation was sought with the creation of the ACLIs, that were given the primary task of “educating” Christian workers who were CGIL members. Later on CGIL split and CISL was born, but the problem of “one faith directed orientation” remained unsolved. The ACLIs themselves did not want to be seen as a “Christian accident” of the workers movement but as explicitly bound to faithfully support the interests of the working class.

This said, let us look at the wider picture, a picture which Francesco Primo strongly denounced thundering against a perverse global economic-financial system that results in the inhuman and

evil dominance of money. That very money that among Christians was referred to as “devil’s excrement”.

The recession that began in 2007 is commonly referred to as “the great recession”. It was triggered by the crisis of the US real estate market, followed by a banking and credit crisis of such proportions that it threatened the demise of the global financial market. This crisis is rightly considered one of the worst economic crises of history, comparable only to the “great depression” of the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Less than 80 years later the present recession has gradually evolved into an enduring global disaster that probably left untouched only China and India.

Though the problems caused by the two crises (that began in 1929 and 2007 respectively) are wide ranging and inclusive (both socially and politically) an even wider vision is necessary. It should specifically tie the present crisis to another date, the date of a different but macroscopic event: 1989. It was the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the consequent unraveling of the communist bloc, a product of Soviet imperialism that had split the world in two. At the time the cognoscenti were talking of the “end of all ideologies” or even “the end of history”, whereas in actual fact it was only the cold war that had ended. Metaphors aside, it was generally agreed that Marx, the founder of historic materialism, was dead. And in the heat of improvised ideological analysis nobody was wondering whether on the opposite side a certain Smith (the celebrated founder of liberal economics and passionate cantor of the market) had also died, or was perhaps still alive. How much the latter ideology was still alive in the Western-Atlantic bloc became apparent somewhat later, when Blair’s New Labour almost inadvertently developed into something similar to the enduring liberalism of the West. The consequence was an almost universal paean to the free market which sowed the seeds of a catastrophic global crisis.

One could legitimately say that Smith too is dead. It may be true, but we should take care not to repeat the same mistake made by those who in 1989 announced the end of history. History keeps unfolding. At most the absence of ideologies causes uncertainty and confusion that make history look a little under the weather, but all that is needed is a doctor to nurse it through the illness.

But whence should this doctor come from? Certainly not from among Marxism nostalgics since Marxism has ended in the dustbin of history (to borrow from Lenin’s vocabulary). And not from the liberal arena and free market supporters, who are no longer in the game. They are the ones who caused the present crisis.

We would say: from the heirs of the Camaldoli Code or anybody else capable – from that premise - of articulating a coherent political and social answer to the economic crisis. But with a substantial difference: the solution can no longer be the quest for a “third way” between Marxist collectivism

and liberal capitalism. We should address today's problems with a clear eye to the future, turning to the only approach that has survived, the solidarism fostered by the Camaldoli Code.

It was drafted way back in 1943 but in some way represents the "zero year" of the Social Weeks promoted by Italian Catholics. However its message is now operating in a very different context, Catholic disengagement. Openly practicing Catholics who strive to spread the Social Doctrine of the Church are confronted with an audience characterized by a potential "absence of Christian Faith" (even the faith of those who believe but do not practice, or those who do not follow the precepts of the Church in matters such as divorce or abortion). In such a context what is SDC to do?

There is only one way, the way that leads to a caring and supportive society. It could come simply from the Gospel: it is what Clara Lubich did, anticipating Pope Francis way back in 1943, the same year of the Camaldoli message, when she founded the Focolari Movement. She spoke then, explicitly, of a "communion economy", i.e. a particular experience of solidarity.

If our goal is to spread Catholic Social Teachings far and wide we must not confine ourselves to a message valid only for those who operate within the ecclesial community. To find the thread that will help us unravel the tangle we must go back to Vatican Council II and the 1976 debate on "Evangelization and Human Promotion". The right approach should be Christian or Catholic but rooted in the Church's teachings and the message specifically social and cultural. We should also be aware of all the perplexities and contradictions that emerged during the above debate. Some participants, misinterpreting some of the Council's documents, maintained not only that Christianity had no "model society" to propose but also that one should specifically deny the existence of a "Catholic culture". This said, the choice to operate specifically at a social and cultural level does not represent a reduction of our identity but expresses the will to affirm in an organized and proactive way the existence of a cultural background to be defended and promoted. In other words failing to promote "humanistically" this culture would mean giving up on the fundamental responsibility of pursuing "human promotion" in concert with all the other human cultures. We can even accept the idea that there is "no model to propose" but should never forget that Christians have been and still are formidable "builders of history". As a minimum it is to them, to the progress of God's people through history, that the creation of medieval society" must be ascribed. It was anything but a barbarous society: it sowed the seeds of later admirable ages such as Humanism and the Renaissance and eventually even of today's scientific-technologic and democratic-enlightened society. If this were not true it would be unrealistic to claim Europe's Christian roots.

There was also the absurd discussion about the theme's formulation: whether the "and" should have been an "or". Some participants polemically sustained that Catholics active in the political or social field should be satisfied with the reference to evangelization and that a specific mention

of human promotion was superfluous. Against this thesis the “unitarian” approach sustained that “Christians, in one comprehensive vision, hold the promise of eternal salvation to be the necessary accompaniment of every project of conquest or transformation of the world. At a profane level the cultural meaning of human promotion well recaps the hopes and demands of all the peoples of the earth”.

Profane values? When John XXIII’s famous encyclical *Pacem in Terris* was published there was a unanimous response of hope. There was a moment, the 1962 Cuba crisis, when politics responded greatly. “John Kennedy, a Catholic, did not substantially change the international strategy of his country but was undoubtedly touched by the words of Pope John and Khrushchev himself, though atheist, was not impervious to them” (from an interview of Antonio Papisca). And it brought peace instead of war. It was the triumph of the “Pope-Kennedy spring” (a synthesis of New Deal and *Pacem in Terris*). It was an event that proved how the lack of Christian faith was not necessarily an obstacle to expressing Christian discernment (as shown by the decision to withdraw soviet missiles from Cuba). St. Paul rightly affirms that “faith moves mountains”. Just as rightly we can add, with Teilhard de Chardin, that “Faith needs all the truth”. Even if for us, at this social-historical moment, a new Camaldoli Code would be enough.