

# Coalitions for Change in an Age of Global Threats

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## 1. Pope Francis' call for mercy and compassion for the poor

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis is seeking to move the merciful face of God to the centre of the Church's gift to the world. God is *misericors*, a notion that includes both 'heart' (*cor*) and 'have compassion for the poor' (*misereri*) – those who suffer and who long. To speak of the merciful God is to emphasise that God has a heart for the poor (*miseri*) – not merely those who are oppressed and exploited but also those 'outcasts' and 'leftovers' who have been excluded from the economy altogether, as the Holy Father warned in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.<sup>1</sup>

To declare God as merciful is also to say that divine mercy forgives the sins of all who recognise the injustice of their thoughts and actions. That is why Pope Francis is asking "the Church [...] to rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The experience of mercy, indeed, becomes visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus himself taught us".<sup>2</sup> This means that neither theological nor ecclesial divisions should obstruct the free flow of forgiveness and all the activities aimed at building more ethical and ecologically resilient models.

The purpose of the Jubilee Year is to bring healing to those who suffer in silence, so that they can once again be actors and participants in society, the polity and the economy. For Pope Francis, business plays a vital role in addressing the ills of poverty and exclusion. As he writes in *Evangelii Gaudium*, "Business is a vocation, and a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life; this will enable them truly to *serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all*".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2013, 53, full text available online at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/francesco/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html)

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Letter to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation on the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015, available online at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150901\\_lettera-indulgenza-giubileo-misericordia.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150901_lettera-indulgenza-giubileo-misericordia.html)

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 203 (my emphasis).

## 2. How Pope Francis is developing Catholic Social Thought

This call for mercy and compassion reflects the Christian humanism and the theology of the dignity of the person that is a key part of Catholic Social Thought. Building on the writings of his predecessors (in particular Saint John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI), Pope Francis is developing the body of Catholic social teaching with its principles for reflection and guidelines for action. In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, he accentuates the importance of natural law and a divinely created cosmic order that are not reducible to human will but instead require careful judgement and prudence. We need to be wary of claims about measureless acquisition and endless growth in a finite world in which humankind transgresses all manner of physical and moral boundaries at its own peril.

As the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams suggests in his reading of *Laudato Si'*, the materialism that characterises the dominant modern ideologies is in fact deeply anti-material and destructive of nature: “The plain thereness of the physical world we inhabit tells us from our first emergence into consciousness that our will is not the foundation of everything – and so its proper working is essentially about creative adjustment to an agenda set not by our fantasy but by the qualities and complexities of what we encounter. The material world tells us that to be human is to be in dialogue with what is other: what is physically other, what is humanly other in the solid three-dimensionality of other persons, ultimately what is divinely other”.<sup>4</sup>

According to Pope Francis’ diagnosis of the contemporary world, the fundamental issue is the loss of meaning – the intrinsic worth and purpose of human beings, other animals and the entire biosphere. Connected with this is a new culture of ‘disposability’ in which everyone and everything that does not satisfy our immediate desires can so readily be dispensed with precisely because it has already been turned into a commodity. Ultimately, as the Pope writes, “when the culture itself is corrupt and objective truth and universally valid principles are no longer upheld, then laws can only be seen as arbitrary impositions or obstacles to be avoided”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Embracing Our Limits: The Lessons of *Laudato Si'*’, *Commonweal*, 23 September 2015, available online at <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/embracing-our-limits>

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2015, 123, full text available online [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)

For Williams, the ‘bold cultural revolution’ that Pope Francis wants to see “is about restored relationship with the creation we belong with and the creator who made us to share his bliss in communion; it is about the unbreakable links between contemplation, eucharist, justice, and social transformation. It constitutes a major contribution to the ongoing unfolding of a body of coherent social teaching, and a worthy expansion and application of the deeply impressive doctrinal syntheses of Pope Benedict’s major encyclicals”.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Virtue and the common good

Against the extremes of statist collectivisation and capitalist commodification, Catholic Social Thought charts an alternative economics that emphasises the common good. From this perspective, legislation and regulation are pointless unless we can move politics and the economy beyond the sole pursuit of private profit or public utility towards a plural search for goods in common that are open to all. In the tradition of Catholic humanism, the common good combines individual fulfilment with mutual flourishing. It neither imposes a single conception of goodness on all, nor does it represent the ‘greatest good of the greatest number’, for both concepts would exclude certain persons or even whole groups.

In his social encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI defines the common good as “the good of ‘all of us’, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it”.<sup>7</sup> Therefore the common good is *not* the total mathematically measurable good – the sum total of individual utilitarian happiness in some artificial aggregate average like national output. For national output counts people one by one, not in their real relationships. By contrast, the common good is concerned with the truest goods that we share together as human beings and members of society.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Williams, ‘Embracing Our Limits: The Lessons of *Laudato Si*’.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, 7, The Vatican, 29 June 2009, full text available online [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html)

<sup>8</sup> Stefano Zamagni, ‘Catholic Social Teaching, Civil Economy, and the Spirit of Capitalism’, in Daniel K. Finn (ed.), *The True Wealth of Nations. Catholic Social Thought and Economic Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 63-93. Stefano Zamagni, an Italian economist, is perhaps best known for his work on the tradition of ‘civil economy’, which is a key notion in *Caritas in veritate*.

Likewise, against the extremes of egoism and abstract altruism, Catholic Social Thought charts an alternative ethics that focuses on human virtue. To speak of virtue does not mean a pious new demand for more morality in public life, as if morality were something alien to the economy or politics, and in tension with their more pragmatic and realistic exigencies. Instead, the crucial point is that there can be no human practice, which is always shared and communal, unless we are aiming for the good in some sense, and have some idea how to recognise and successfully pursue it. Thus for the tradition of Catholic social teaching, morality is not a kind of optional extra for either the economic or the political process. Instead, ethics is in continuity with all human activities, including finance and business. Pope Francis puts this succinctly: “ethics – a non-ideological ethics – would make it possible to bring about balance [in the marketplace] and a more humane social order”.<sup>9</sup>

The conception of economics and ethics that emerges from the body of Catholic social teaching provides principles for reflection and guidelines for action on the key contemporary challenges of poverty and the refugee crisis. Pope Francis links the preferential option for the poor to reciprocal obligations and the value of work. Reciprocal obligations means that that the rich have a duty to “help, respect, and promote the poor”<sup>10</sup> and that this “is an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good”.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Catholic Social Thought rejects a passive state of dependency and a mentality of individual entitlements and state hand-outs, which characterise the modern welfare state. Instead, the aim is to uphold the dignity of the human person by emphasising contribution to society and the importance of work. That is why, in the words of the Holy Father, financial help for the poor “must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a *dignified life through work*”.<sup>12</sup>

All this means that entrepreneurship is vital for the reduction of poverty, inequality and exclusion. Indeed, as he writes in *Laudato Si*’, “business is a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving our world. It can be a fruitful source of prosperity for the areas in which it operates, especially if it sees the *creation of jobs as an essential part of its service to the common good*”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 57.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 58.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*’, 158.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*’, 128 (my emphasis).

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*’, 129 (my emphasis).

Likewise, on the refugee emergency, the Catholic Church calls on states not only to welcome refugees who face persecution or extreme economic hardship but also to provide assistance to countries where migration originates in order to allow people to stay at home: “The Church stands at the side of all who work to defend each person’s right to live with dignity, first and foremost by exercising the right not to emigrate and to contribute to the development of one’s country of origin”.<sup>14</sup> Beyond the choice between an open- and a closed-door policy, Catholic Social Thought reminds us that mercy and compassion have to be combined with assistance for people in their own countries and programmes of integration that take into account the rights and duties of all. In this manner, Catholic social teaching seeks a balance of interests, linking solidarity with refugees to their respect for the laws and traditions of host countries.

Exclusion and the refugee emergency show that Catholic Social Thought provides not just principles for reflection but also guidelines for action. The challenge is to translate the language of Catholic social teaching into political and business terms and to work out policies and strategies that are faithful to the tradition. The *Fondazione Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice* and all its members are uniquely positioned to develop new ideas for transforming politics and the economy in line with virtue and the common good. One specific question that arises in the current context is how the *FCAPP* can help in the building of coalitions for change that are able to apply the principles of Catholic social teaching to the global problems of economic exclusion and the refugee crisis.

#### **4. Coalitions for change**

In the face of global threats, the task is how to organise people of all faiths and none around a shared programme for more moral and environmentally viable forms of growth and development. Arguably, some of the most effective ways of organisation tend to come from locally-based citizens initiatives that are able to link up all the different dimensions – ecological, economic and political – in a movement that seeks to resist the drift towards turning everything and everyone into a commodity. Not accidentally these movements – as supremely in the case of ‘community-organising’<sup>15</sup> – tend to have a pan-religious dimension

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<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2016, The Vatican, 17 January 2016, at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150912\\_world-migrants-day-2016.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20150912_world-migrants-day-2016.html)

<sup>15</sup> Arnie Graf, ‘Community Organising and Blue Labour’, in Ian Geary and Adrian Pabst (eds.), *Blue Labour: Forging a New Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), pp. 71-78.

and in this respect to transcend the modern instrumentalisation of faith as a vehicle for power or wealth (or both at once). ‘Community-organising’ was pioneered in the USA, and it involves educating and training members to become leaders. The leaders become the co-creators of powerful, broad-based and culturally, economically as well as religiously diverse organisations in the community and in the workplace. These organisations are autonomous and democratically self-governing. By contrast with single-issue movements (such as numerous new social movements that emerged in the 1990s), community- and workplace-based organisations are multi-issue, action-oriented and run by a broad leadership team. The main task of leaders is to recruit, educate and develop new leaders by building relationships that can sustain and grow organisations around common concerns which bring quality to people’s lives.

So why does religion tend to be central to new forms of civic participation such as ‘community-organising’?<sup>16</sup> It is religions that tend to propose some overall account of humanity and as teleologically directed by nature in an ethical direction, without which ethics must sink to the level of sentimental moralism – often linked to double standards (as in the case of those people in public life who demand from others the respect of rules which they themselves do not obey).

However, local initiatives often fail to gain traction with the mainstream political parties, and they are sometimes co-opted by extreme right or extreme left parties. There is therefore a continued need to try to link this local level with a wider national and international attempt to make the principles of Catholic Social Thought the new basis on which to rethink practices in business, politics and beyond. Above all, there remains a clear need for a broad movement in shaping an economics and a politics of the common good – a movement that can overcome the binaries that divide many countries around the world: young *versus* old, owners *versus* workers, natives *versus* immigrants, city *versus* countryside, faithful *versus* secular. New vehicles are needed that can bring together individuals and groups with seemingly opposite values and interests, including trade unions, business associations and faith communities. If they can together build organisations with new members and activists beyond single-issue protest and sectional interest, then they can help renew political debate and even public

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<sup>16</sup> See Austin Ivereigh, *Faithful Citizens. A Practical Guide to Catholic Social Teaching and Community Organising* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010).

policy. Thus the body of Catholic social teaching has the potential to inspire a broader cultural movement promoted by the churches, other faith traditions and civic groups.

From the perspective of Catholic Social Thought, not only is an economics and politics of the common good a better alternative to existing ideologies and vested interests, which are often either moralistic or amoral. But it is also the case that only an ethical alliance of disparate forces which is likely to be able to put this alternative into place. Given the general drift towards greater inequality and cultural insecurity, it is important to stress that a potential for transformation, not by any one particular group or class, but by ‘everyone’ already exists. But just because it concerns everyone, it can only be authentically articulated and organised in more ‘organic’, overarching terms. That is to say, in the name of human flourishing as such, and in a way that links together all the dimensions of political, economic and social life. This will require a new ‘irruption’ of a communicable ethical vision (religiously inspired for many), genuinely able to move people.

Perhaps the realisation of such a vision requires above all the pursuit of Christian ecumenism under a new sense of practical exigency and public responsibility and not just inward-looking idealism. Allied to this should be a new sense, already present in the Catholic Church in many countries, that Christian churches need now to organise and act directly in the economic and even the political field, not through existing political parties but by engaging people where they live, work and worship. One can see the relevance of such an ecumenism to new global threats such as economic volatility, climate change, terrorism and indeed migration, as the joint declaration on common threats to Christianity by Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill on 12 February 2015 underscores.

And allied to the ecumenical exigency in turn should be a new recognition that, for all the inevitably enormous area of acceptable disagreement and uncertainty, there is a much greater consensus implied by Christian belief than has recently been taken to be the case. The broad appeal of Catholic Social Thought can help build a new common ground that can be shared for the most part by people of other faiths and for non-religious people who recognise the limits of the dominant models. There are many non-religious people who fully recognise the existence and irreducibility of humanity and who respect the wider mystery and value of the natural world.

But even if the emergence of a (religiously inspired) movement seems unlikely, it is far more effective than other scenarios such as the impossible return to the stability of the post-1945 settlement or the mobilisation of people by the far left or the far right (or the populist fusion of both that we are seeing around the globe). That is so because both the mainstream and the new populists across the political spectrum are today hampered by certain structures that neutralise systemic change but also by the inadequacy of their own analysis – that the economy is fully divorced from ethics and politics from religion. Coalitions for real change need to be based on a substantive vision of true human happiness or *eudamonia* – individual fulfilment and mutual flourishing in accordance with the common good. At the heart of this vision lies a distinct anthropology, the sense that human beings – as integral ‘social’ and ‘political’ animals – are all cultural labourers who work because they are guided by a sense of the further realisation of the Good. “Man” being, as Thomas Carlyle put it, “the missionary of Order”.<sup>17</sup>

## 5. Concluding reflections and questions for discussion

Catholic Social Thought fuses the universal principles of Christian humanism with particular practices of economic and social transformation in line with virtue and the common good. More specifically, the tradition of Catholic social teaching reminds us of the connection between a relational understanding of the person and the institutional arrangements required for the reciprocal development of individuals and associations at different levels of society. In economic terms, Catholic Social Thought helps us to imagine a politics of the common good that is pro-business and pro-worker precisely because it views capital and labour in more relational, personal terms. It sees them as estranged interests that can be brought together in a negotiated settlement through new civic institutions. Thus Catholic social teaching seeks to broker cooperation based on the shared self-interest of legislators, regulators and all the stakeholders involved in the economy: owners/investors, managers, workers, consumers, suppliers, creditors and local communities. A society shaped by the common good requires a commitment to virtue, which is about ‘good doing’ rather than ‘do gooding’. In this sense, virtue – not rights, utility or profit – can help us envision a more ethical economy and even a more noble politics.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2005), p. 95.

<sup>18</sup> John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-liberalism and the Human Future* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016).

In light of these remarks, it may be worth reflecting on the following questions:

- (1) Why do so many groups in society tend to become self-serving over time, and how can we instil in them a sense of virtue and a commitment to the common good?
- (2) Why are people with shared interest estranged from one another (e.g. different stakeholders in the economy or decision-makers in politics), and how can actors identify shared interests and pursue them together?
- (3) Why are many organisations centralised and unaccountable to their members, and how can they foster virtuous leadership and greater participation within and between organisations?
- (4) Why do businesses, trade unions, the churches and other faith communities operate in separate spaces, and how can they join force on issues of common concern such as promoting ethical enterprise and virtuous banking?
- (5) Why are moral markets often small-scale and how can we ‘up-scale’ ethically and ecologically viable organisations and practices?
- (6) Why do so many laws and regulations incentivise human vice such as greed, and how can we put in place incentives and rewards for virtuous action?
- (7) Why are different societies seemingly incapable of systemic change, and what can be the role of ‘creative minorities’ (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) in bringing about transformation through leadership by example?
- (8) How can the Church together with FCAPP and kindred organisations involve entrepreneurs in new coalitions to help reduce poverty and exclusion, by creating jobs, providing apprenticeships and building resilient local economies?
- (9) How can the Church together with FCAPP and kindred organisations make a tangible contribution to alleviating the refugee crisis, by working with people on the ground to improve the conditions in refugee camps and defend the interests of persecuted minorities such as Oriental Christians and the Yazidi (who have no places of worship in the camps)?
- (10) How can the Church together with FCAPP and kindred organisations support and take forward the idea of Voluntary Solidarity Funds in order to provide alternative investment opportunities and encourage other economic actors to adopt models of ethical enterprise?