

International Conference--Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation

Rethinking Key Features of Economic and Social Life

Monday May 25 and Tuesday May 26 2015

GROUP DISCUSSIONS (English-speakers)

Chairman: Dr. Joseph Borg (FCAPP Malta)

Rapporteur Dr. James Rice (FCAPP USA)

3rd Session

An urgent message for today's world: can Catholic Social Teaching be spread even without the Christian faith?

The final session began with a quotation "Love faces a vast field of work and the Church is eager to make her contribution with her social doctrine, which concerns the whole person and is addressed to all people. So many needy brothers and sisters are waiting for help, so many who are oppressed are waiting for justice, so many who are unemployed are waiting for a job, so many peoples are waiting for respect" (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church 5, 2004).

The group first heard from two professors of Catholic Social Teaching, one of whom encouraged more discussion of secularism and liberalism with students, citing the recent vote in Ireland on same-sex marriage. Another found himself co-teaching at a Catholic university and the students were predominately of the Muslim faith. He decided not to treat Catholic Social Teaching as a secular matter but presented it as a faith subject.

It was suggested that one should not shy away from presenting the teaching as Catholic, at least with people of faith. It was pointed out that some prominent leaders who are not themselves Catholic employ Catholic Social Teaching principles in their careers, including such people as Colin Powell who used the principles both in his military and diplomatic roles. More than one Archbishop of Canterbury has publicly embraced Catholic Social Teaching as appropriate for use in the Anglican community. Another perspective is that Catholicism, perhaps uniquely, combines faith and reason. While we can come to some of the same conclusions merely by the use of reason, the fullness of Catholic Social Teaching requires faith as well.

There was support for the concept of increasing the understanding of Catholics themselves of Catholic Social Teaching. One must not assume that Catholics are generally familiar with this subject, particularly since it is not generally taught in the Catholic schools, universities nor even seminaries, so there is little chance for young people to get a foundation in the subject matter. The intent should be to convey the moral purpose of Catholic Social Teaching, which can then lead to ethical behavior. At present, ethical discussions are often at a very primitive level without

a firm foundation in principles. We should consider using outsiders to teach ethics in various businesses.

Still another perspective is that Catholic Social Teaching is a unique theological and philosophical subject, based on scripture which is shared in many respects with Muslims, Jews and Protestants. A study of Catholic Social Teaching can bring a surprising coherence to the subject of ethics for students of various faiths or even no faith.

One way these general principles can be manifest in the business community is so-called “impact investment”, which focuses on more than mere profit for the investor but also on the greater good. Interestingly, we find that subjects like Muslim finance find their way to secular academic and business journals. We should not be afraid to present Catholic Social Teaching in a similar manner.

All in all, there seemed to be a consensus that we should not fear including faith in discussing the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, whatever the audience might be. The session concluded with an apt quotation from Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*:

“276. Christ’s resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power.”

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