



Fondazione Centesimus Annus – Pro Pontefice - Dublin Group
A DIALOGUE ON FINANCE AND THE COMMON GOOD

Speaking noters for the opening remarks of
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Speaking to a group of business people here in Dublin not so long ago, I was asked: “What does a Bishop know about the mechanics of the economy and of social and corporate responsibility?” I responded, if the Pope had sent me back to Dublin as Archbishop on account of my business and management skills, then the Pope had lost his infallibility. The task of a Bishop in talking about social responsibility and concern about justice is complex. It is not simply the enunciation of theological principles. It involves not just a catalogue of denunciations of injustices. It is not just encouraging positive initiatives and support for those who witness in their lives to the cause of justice. It is all of these and more.

In today’s culture a bishop’s role is that of fostering a dialogue between theological reflection on the one hand and the fruits of human sciences and social investigation on the other, in order to foster social concern on a broad level and to focus on how we can best place people, created in God’s image, at the centre of our future vision of the economy and of society.

Poverty is the inability to realise God-given potential. Fighting poverty is about enabling people to be the people that God wants them to be. Solidarity is above all being with others, being alongside them so that they can take their destiny into the own hands. Solidarity is not just doing things for others. Working for justice can never be understood as taking decisions for other, but in enhancing them to make responsible decisions in the areas that are of their competence and capacity. The social teaching of the Church is not a manifesto or an ideological platform. It is a body of principles derived ultimately from the gospel that provide criteria for Christian believers to assume responsibility for social action.

The role of the Bishop belongs within that great tradition of the social teaching of the Church and especially that evolution of the Church’s social teaching from the time of Leo XIII’s Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* until today

and marked periodically by major Papal social Encyclicals which address the changing issues of each period of time.

And of course this tradition is grounded in the concrete concern and commitment of individual Christians and Christian communities authentically living out their Christian life within society in changing times and cultures. My great mentor, Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, constantly said that on the morning after the publication of a Papal Social Encyclical the first pages of the next social encyclical were already being written as Christians began to apply the new Encyclical to their daily lives.

Our sessions in these days are part of that ongoing dialogue between economics and ethics which is so important in today's world. Theological reflection also has its contribution to make. The Christian believer is obliged to be concerned about the common good by virtue of his or her own belief. Pope Francis, in his Encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* and in his preaching stresses this unity between the task of proclaiming the Gospel and concern for the world we live in and its people. "At the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others" (n. 177) "Accepting the first proclamation of the Gospel which invites us to receive God's love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others" (n.178). That indeed is a very short summary also of what the fundamental ethical demand on the economy is: the obligation to desire and to seek and protect the common good.

Love is of the essence of the Christian life, because God loved us first. We can see that love was recognised as of the essence of the Christian life from the self description of the early Church communities: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (*Acts* 2:44-5). This self-presentation of the early Christian community by Saint Luke is part of a number of similar formulae which provide a kind of definition of the Church, whose constitutive elements include fidelity to the "teaching of the Apostles", "communion and sharing", "the breaking of the bread" and "prayer" (cf. *Acts* 2:42). The element of "communion" (*koinonia*) consisted in the fact that believers held all things in common and that among them, there was to be no longer any distinction between rich and poor.

This radical form of material communion of the early Christian community could not however be preserved in the same way as the Church expanded and grew both numerically and in geographical extension. But its essential dimension remained and has to be retained in every era and epoch

of the history of the Church and of the world. The Church does not espouse an ideology of being poor. The Church community is one where no one should be left poor, that is, deprived of what is needed for a dignified life. For Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium* one of the basic ethical demands in all a economic activity is “the inclusion of the poor in society” (n.186-192).

Poverty is not simply a lack of financial or material resources. Poverty is, as I said, the inability of people to realise their God-given potential. A Church which wishes to remain true to the “communion” which was characteristic of the early Church must be one where its members and its structures work together to ensure that the caring, healing and restoring power which Jesus showed in his miracles, is made visible today, through individual lives and through forms of community witness and structures.

The commandment of love of neighbour, grounded in the love that God first showed us, is clearly a responsibility for individual Christians. But it is also a responsibility to be developed in an appropriate way by the entire ecclesial community at every level and at every time in its history. The practice of love must be a distinctive mark of every expression of the life of the Church.

Can love be organized and become an ordered service to the community in our world today? How does that organization of love change with the different concrete situations in which the Church finds itself? Love is not an added-on element of the work of charitable organizations.

Pope Benedict in speaking of Catholic social endeavours notes: “Yet, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern... Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a ‘formation of the heart’: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others”.

For me, one of the most striking gestures of Pope Francis was that encounter with a young man whose face was covered in sores. The Pope did not do what most of us would probably have done: greeted him from a safe distance or simply asked him – or perhaps asked his doctors - what disease he had. No, he stopped and kissed the man. The basic ethics of leadership must be a basic ethics of humanity, which is the most challenging ethics of all and one in which all of us, me included, continuously fail. That

fundamental ethics of humanity is however the one without which all our other ethical projects will fall flat.

The challenge to constructing solidarity is that it must take place within the concrete realities of the world and it must try to identify the optimal management of various elements within that reality as times change.

What is important is to develop a framework of labour in which the advancement of human capital is prioritised. In many cases in our European countries, there are extremely high levels of youth unemployment. At times the statistics may be distorted by the fact that many young people have emigrated in any case and no longer figure on the statistics of their own country. The level of youth unemployment may thus be *de facto* even higher than the official statistics. In Ireland we have a very large number of highly qualified unemployed youth. Up to 60% of our young emigrants in recent years have had university degrees.

In our discernment of the phenomenon of globalization we should in particular recall the very important principle stressed by Pope John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus* (#39) namely, that “the economy is only one aspect and one dimension of human activity” and that “economic freedom is only one element of human freedom”. If economic life is absolutised, if the production and consumption of goods become the centre of social life and society’s only value, not subject to any other value, economic freedom loses its necessary relationship the human person, and ends up by alienating and oppressing”

To be at the service of the human person, then, economic activity requires an ethical and legal framework. The market can only work within an ethical framework of trust. That ethical framework needs to be concretized in juridical norms which guarantee fair-play, competition and transparency. The legal framework must also ensure that economic freedom is situated within a wider system of fundamental human values, and that certain “collective goods” (CA, #40) – including the rights of workers - are protected, and that or certain fundamental human needs which “find no place on the market” (#34) do not remain unsatisfied.

We should also clearly remember however that wherever the rule of law is not respected, it is almost always the poor who pay the highest price. The poor pay the price of corruption. The poor are the primary victims of violence. It is not always realised that the poor so often pay the price of protectionism. The poor pay the price of inefficiency in public services,

especially education and health care. Inefficiency is a major form of corruption.

Why is it that despite progress in science and technology, we have never been able to fully address the challenge of development? Pope Benedict XVI has addressed this question from another and deeper level to which we must pay attention in developing Christian understanding of solidarity at the service of the human family.

In his Encyclical on hope, Pope Benedict asks “what does ‘progress’ really mean; what does it promise and what does it not promise?” He notes that if we examine our models of progress attentively we will identify what he calls “The ambiguity of progress” “Without doubt”, the Pope writes “[progress] offers new possibilities for good, but it also opens up appalling possibilities for evil—possibilities that formerly did not exist.. If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man's ethical formation, in man's inner growth (cf. *Eph* 3:16; *2 Cor* 4:16), then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world”.

Fundamentally we too often fail to recognise that the world we live in is not ours to do with as we wish; it is, rather, gift to be used according to God’s plan. The ambiguity within progress is rooted in our inability or willingness to accept that plan. Pope Benedict challenges us with a striking phrase: “There is no doubt that “the Kingdom of God” accomplished without God – a kingdom therefore of human creation alone – inevitably ends up as the perverse end of all things”.

When God created humanity he created it as a family. This is a simple affirmation. From this affirmation, however, flow the principles of common responsibility, of solidarity and of that familial relationship of love that should be the true trademark of relationships among people and between peoples. This is indeed the fundamental principle that should guide the process of globalization. Globalization will be worthy of its name if it enhances the unity of the human family. Any form of globalization that breeds exclusion, marginalization, instability, indifference and crass inequality does not have the right to call itself global. Globalization has to be made the synonym of inclusive. How an economic system generates inclusion is the fundamental measure of its success.