

***Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice* Foundation 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference**  
**“New Policies and Lifestyles in the Digital Age”**  
**Opening Remarks of His Eminence, Cardinal Pietro Parolin,**  
**Session on “A Common Christian Agenda for the Common Good”**

*Vatican City, 26 May 2018*

Your Holiness,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to begin by extending a reverent, warm and fraternal welcome to Your Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, here in the Vatican for this conference. To all present, and especially the members of the *Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice* Foundation, I would like to extend my cordial greeting. I am particularly grateful to the President, Dr Domingo Sugranyes Bickel, for the invitation to preside over this session, dedicated to the question of “*A Common Christian Agenda for the Common Good*”, which concludes the three-day programme dedicated to the theme “*New Policies and Lifestyles in the Digital Age*”, which coincides with the Silver Anniversary of the *Centesimus Annus* Foundation.

*A “Christian Agenda”?*

At first sight, it may seem that the title of this session is somewhat imprecise and ambiguous. How is it that we speak of a “Christian Agenda”? Typically, in our everyday language, hearing the word “agenda” provokes, and reasonably so, thoughts of a “political” agenda or even a “personal” agenda. Indeed, “agenda” is often denoted as something self-serving, whether for an individual, a group or a country. After all, do we not usually hear the term “agenda” preceded by the possessive “my”, which would lead us to deduce that the term is inherently narcissistic? As such, we may be hesitant to accept the terminology “Christian Agenda”, for fear that we may be moving toward an individualist understanding and application of the term “agenda” which renders it difficult to modify by the term “Christian”, which, by definition, denotes a “communion of persons”, a “gift of self”, “sacrificial love” and “care for our fellow human beings”.

*A Christian Agenda for the Common Good*

I wish to propose that we may indeed speak of a “Christian Agenda”, even with a more political understanding of “agenda”, especially if we consider that politics seeks the common good of the *polis*. The common good is not some ethereal notion, it is concrete

and real: it is the good of all of humanity and each of its members! It is defined as “*the sum total of all conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily. The resulting rights and obligations are consequently the concern of the entire human race. Every group must take into account the needs and legitimate aspirations of every other group, and even those of the human family as a whole.*”<sup>1</sup>

The realisation of the common good must remain the goal of every expression of social life – from the family to social and church groups and enterprises of an economic nature, from cities to regions and States, right up to the community of the Family of Nations – because, in the common good, we find the constitutive element that gives significance and purpose to social existence. Pope Francis offers a clear description of this essential relationship: “*There cannot be true communion and commitment to the common good and social justice without fraternity and sharing. Without fraternal sharing, no ecclesial or civil community can be formed: there is only an ensemble of individuals moved or grouped together, according to common interests.*”<sup>2</sup>

#### “Commonality” rooted in ecumenical ties

The “commonality” of a Christian agenda is fundamentally rooted in the ecumenical ties that bind all Christians, faith in Jesus Christ and his message of salvation, the Gospel, which lies at the heart of the Social Doctrine of the Church. In this sense, it may be said that the “Christian agenda for the common good” is as “common” as are the bonds of faith and communion that bind all Christians, spiritual bonds, which motivate us to work for the common good of the whole of humanity. Through these bonds we acknowledge that we are called to exercise stewardship, and not domination, over God’s creation, and that yes, indeed, we are our “brother’s keeper”. A clear example of shared concern for the common good is found in the Joint Statement on the Environment by Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew of 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017.

A “Christian” political agenda entails seeking the full and integral promotion of the human person, created in the image of God, without obscuring the fundamentally transcendent/spiritual nature. This transcendent/spiritual dimension is not something ancillary, but rather essential. Pope John Paul II expressed this concept well in his social encyclical *Centesimus Annus*: “*God is the ultimate end of his creatures and for no reason may the common good be deprived of its transcendental dimension, which moves beyond the historical dimension and at the same time fulfilling it.*”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et Spes* 26.1.

<sup>2</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Regina Coeli*, 2 April 2018.

<sup>3</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 170 (Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 41).

### *Challenges to the Common Good*

Nevertheless, and arguably perhaps more than ever, we see first-hand in our world the consequences of “political agendas”, which either blur or completely obfuscate the transcendent dimension of the common good and of the human person. These “agendas” promote “lesser goods” and “national interests” over and against the common good and, as a result, have negative effects which tend to have global consequences.

In response to these mounting challenges of our day, the Holy See, through its diplomatic activity, seeks to promote a “common Christian agenda for the common good” that is rooted in principles of Christian anthropology. Allow me to highlight briefly a few of the more recent items on the Holy See’s “agenda” in promoting the common good.

### *Integral Human Development through Just Economic and Financial Systems*

The most elementary aspect of the common good is the protection of human life in all its stages. In this Holy See has been especially active, precisely because the existence of the entire human race is at stake.

The Holy See is also heavily involved in the fight against poverty and in the promotion of integral human development, including combatting those situations of endemic injustice and social exclusion, which arise, for example, from unfair economic systems and uncontrolled financial institutions. One method could be to monitor trade and financial flows between States, with the aim of overcoming economic injustices that we still witness today, where a miniscule portion of the population enjoys a vast amount of wealth, while a huge number of people remain in extreme poverty. This situation endures and, in fact, is becoming more acute in what seems like “*a return to the heights of myopic egoism, limited by an inadequate framework that, excluding the common good, also excludes from its horizons the concern to create and spread wealth, and to eliminate the inequality so pronounced today.*”<sup>4</sup>

### *Care for our Common Home*

Caring for the common good is strictly connected with caring for our common home. Everything is inter-related. Pope Francis proposes a new mindset, one based on the concept of “integral ecology.” It is an expression that captures an ancient awareness that all living beings, human groups and systems, as well as non-human ones – that is, all of creation – are fundamentally interconnected.

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<sup>4</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, *Oeconomicae et pecuniariae quaestiones: Considerations for an Ethical Discernment Regarding Some Aspects of the Present Economic-Financial System*, 6 January 2018, 5.

With the signing of the Paris Climate Agreement in December 2015, the international community found itself in unison on the need for a global and consolidated effort. Such an effort is needed if we are genuinely concerned with leaving the future generations of humanity with a common home in good order. Indeed, “*the notion of the common good also extends to future generations.*”<sup>5</sup>

The landmark agreement, preceded by numerous other multilateral accords on a series of environmental issues, was received and applauded by an overwhelming majority of Countries. At present, however, there is the real risk of losing the initial fervour and impetus behind the Paris Accord. In this regard, it is remarkable how weak international political responses have been. The failure of so many international agreements on the environment tragically demonstrates the extent to which political agendas are subject to technology and finance. Pope Francis quite rightly observes: “*There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected... The alliance between the economy and technology ends up side-lining anything unrelated to its immediate interests.*”<sup>6</sup>

In order to overcome this eclipse of the common good of our common home, a vision and an approach which considers the future of others is needed, more specifically, an intergenerational solidarity. We must remember that our common home is not so much something that we have inherited from previous generations, but, at the same time, something which we must pass on, in the best shape possible, to future generations.

### *Peaceful Coexistence and International Security*

The “nurturing” of the common good lies in the promotion of the conditions for peace. Here it is worth reaffirming the words of the Conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: “*Peace is not merely the absence of war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice. Peace results from that order structured into human society by its divine Founder, and actualized by men as they thirst after ever-greater justice. The common good of humanity finds its ultimate meaning in the eternal law. But since the concrete demands of this common good are constantly changing as time goes on, peace is never attained once and for all, but must be built up ceaselessly.*”<sup>7</sup>

“*Peace – the Council continues – must be born of mutual trust between nations and not be imposed on them through a fear of the available weapons, everyone must labour to put an end at last to the arms race, and to make a true beginning of disarmament, not unilaterally indeed, but*

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<sup>5</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato si'*, 159.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>7</sup> VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 78.

*proceeding at an equal pace according to agreement, and backed up by true and workable safeguards.”<sup>8</sup>*

The Holy See is fully committed in all areas pertaining to disarmament, one of which is nuclear disarmament. Although lacking any military or economic leverage in the global arena, the Holy See has, nevertheless, been constant in appealing to civil authorities that true peace and sustainable national security cannot be founded upon the fear of mutually assured destruction. In this sense, the abolition of nuclear arsenals, a goal deemed unattainable by sceptics, would be a step in the right direction towards a peaceful and secure future, a real boost for the common good of humanity. For this reason, the Holy Father considers the possession, and potential use, of nuclear weapons as one of greatest threats to the human race. A clear act of witness to this conviction came on 20<sup>th</sup> September last year, when the Holy See was one of the first to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Your Holiness and Dear Friends,

While certainly not exhaustive – indeed, there are numerous other aspects that could also be considered for our reflection, including the global response to migrants and refugees, the constant threats to human rights and fast-developing issues such as cyber-security and artificial intelligence – these brief examples demonstrate the “*Christian Agenda for the Common Good*”. By way of conclusion, I would simply like to remind you that we, most especially as Christians, cannot *not* act for the promotion of the common good. What is at stake is the “*authentic well-being of a majority of the men and women of our planet who are at risk of being ‘excluded and marginalized’ from development and true well-being while a minority, indifferent to the condition of the majority, exploits and reserves for itself substantial resources and wealth.*”<sup>9</sup>

I would like, however, to conclude with a message of hope. I take the words that Pope Francis pronounced on his visit in 2015 to the United Nations Offices at Nairobi: “*At the same time we believe that ‘human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good and making a new start’ ... If this is to happen, the economy and politics need to be placed at the service of peoples, with the result that ‘human beings, in harmony with nature, structure the entire system of production and distribution in such a way that the abilities and needs of each individual find suitable expression in social life’. Far from an idealistic utopia, this is a realistic prospect which makes the human person and human dignity the point of departure and the goal of everything.*”<sup>10</sup>

In thanking you all for your kind attention, I am pleased to invite His Holiness, Patriarch Bartholomew, to the podium to give his address.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>9</sup> *Oeconomicae et pecuniariae quaestiones*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address at the United Nations Office at Nairobi*, 26 November 2015.