



CENTESIMUS ANNUS PRO PONTIFICE FOUNDATION

2019 STATEMENT

ETHICS FOR AN AGE OF “NEW THINGS”:

RESPONSIBILITY, CREATIVITY AND PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE

In our digital communications ecosystem and ‘machine learning’ environment, technical tools have a direct influence on human culture. The creation, accumulation and use of ‘big data’ are all-embracing and their potential growth is exponential. The ethical debate about privacy and the abuse of information is already everywhere. But new ethically significant developments arise also in other areas of ‘artificial intelligence’, from agriculture and food to industry, healthcare, urban development, catastrophe risk control and climate change. At the same time, we are still getting to grips with ethical failures in the past: more than ever, an old concept based on individual, ‘gold-rush’ maximization of personal gain is threatening the very integrity of humankind.

The “new things” challenge Catholic Social Teaching to formulate new personal and collective answers. Institutions show positive and negative developments: for the first time, the international community has reached a consensus on Sustainable Development Goals which involve governments, public opinion and business worldwide. On the contrary, however, cooperation policies pursuing solidarity seem to meet with unprecedented fear, scepticism or indifference.

Each of us can act directly in favour of solidarity and sustainability through entrepreneurship, investment, political engagement and generous donation. But the intellectual framework is important too, and Christians also need to lead a renewal of ideas, which can play a decisive role in bringing about change in society.

From the recent work of the *Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice* Foundation,¹ in its effort to identify ways towards a sustainable, fully human market economy, the following guidelines emerged, which are being offered to all members of the Church: employers and workers, academics, clergy, laity, educators, consumers, citizens, the young and the old. They do not pretend to be exhaustive but propose some signals in our journey.²

¹ International conferences held at the Vatican on May 18-20, 2017 and May 24-26, 2018. 5th ‘Dublin Process’ Consultation held at Fordham University, New York, on March 15-16, 2018. Details can be found on line at <http://www.centesimusannus.org/en/>

² Previous CAPP Statements were published in 2015 (A REFORMED MARKET ECONOMY: ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT) and in 2017 (CONSTRUCTING ALTERNATIVES TO PROMOTE HUMAN DIGNITY). These documents can be found on line at <http://www.centesimusannus.org/en/the-institution/capp-statement/>

1. **Educating people** to take responsibility in a context of equal opportunities remains the key instrument for human development. Excellence in education is not that of pursuing status or privilege. While proposing usable skills and tools for judgement, the aim is to develop the ability of people to make informed choices, to overcome dependence on consumption and to foster among students of all ages the natural will for cooperation and good quality work. Business enterprise, which often find difficulties in recruiting suitably skilled people, need to invest more directly in permanent vocational training and apprenticeship.
2. **Families** need to prepare themselves for the new environment, where inter-generational dialogue is difficult due to work pressure, lack of time and technological invasion. We must invest in creating the necessary space for conversation and exchange. The aim is to construct a culture of mutual respect and virtue-driven behaviour, especially regarding gender equality and the valuing of different contributions to the common good.
3. As **users of technology** in a competitive world, whether as professionals or as members of the Church, we need to apply the most efficient technical instruments available. But our duty is also to look for the best use of data and processes, to protect those at risk and defend their rights against monopolistic abuse. Democracy requires transparency about the choices underlying expert systems. Scientific and managerial responsibility imply stopping developments which can exceed and escape human control. Technology needs to be ergonomically oriented, where human work is supported and multiplied by machines. This requires dialogue with algorithm developers, understanding of new languages, discernment between means and ends, and initiative to foster purposeful innovation.
4. The **nature of work** is changing. This affects levels of participation in remunerated employment as well as the need for different skills and different contractual arrangements. Many new jobs are being created while others disappear, the transition is disruptive and difficult. More time may become available for personal and collective leisure; some suffer from greater job precariousness while others may enjoy increased flexibility. We must promote continuous support to manage these changes for persons of all ages, talents and vocations.
5. A **profitable operation** able to compete and to reinvest in company growth remains the essence of entrepreneurship. The parameters of ownership and management decision-making must become wider, not only to include the interests of all stakeholders in the company. A practical reflection is needed on how each company's production and marketing activities and its products or services contribute to society, both locally, nationally and internationally.
6. **Equitable distribution of proceeds and fair risk sharing** are necessary themes for business ethics. The share of labour has been steadily dwindling for the last three decades in most rich countries, while the increased precariousness of jobs indicates that a larger share of risk may fall on the weaker part. There is need for a renewed social dialogue in which Catholic Social Teaching can once more play an inspirational role.
7. The **new work context** demands that we return to simple, basic questions about distribution: are working hours paid fairly? How can workers' rights be protected in such a changing context? What about dwindling rich populations and the expectations of migrant workers? Dialogue among employers' associations and workers' unions is urgent to navigate these uncharted waters in a joint effort.
8. **Codes of business ethics** have proven to be insufficient. Identification of problem areas was sometimes obsolete, promulgation in the organizations was ineffective and

their application lacked good example and courage from the top. A healthy review of this is under way in many business schools and business organizations. We must draw lessons from the mistakes of the past and work towards institutionalizing accountability.

9. The real **cost of environmental damage** should be calculated and reflected transparently in the price of industrial or service products, to stop unjust socialization or the transfer of hidden cost to the next generations. Business, politicians and public opinion should support a new consensus on a more realistic accounting and financial reporting system.
10. Nobody can ignore the **use of internet for criminal ends**, especially human trafficking and sexual abuse on children. It is a responsibility for us all to be informed and to act within our possibilities to help stopping such abhorrent activity.
11. Resisting the **'throwaway culture'** denounced by Pope Francis implies in the first instance our responsibility in reducing the loss and waste of around thirty per cent of food that is produced and distributed worldwide. This includes promoting joint ventures in developing countries to improve the quality and productivity in food production, on the one hand, and a fight against waste and alternatives to distribute excess food to people in need, on the other.
12. Each of us needs to **rediscover creativity**. Against the prevailing culture characterized by superficiality, vulgarity, egoism, envy and greed, Christians and others have the task to promote creativity and responsibility as the bases on which to build a global culture of justice and inclusion in the digital age. Human memory (as opposed to machine repositories); time, culture and discernment to distinguish emotions from rational thinking; and spirituality are three bases on which we can contribute to new development patterns.

Lay people are responsible for evangelization by communicating and practicing social teaching, an essential part of the Church's message. To be convincing and credible, the teaching needs to be relevant to the social, economic and technological changes that surround us, as well as true to the deep personal experience of solidarity: to acknowledge the human person as a relational being, and to understand that giving enriches the giver, that to give is to receive.

In the words of Pope Francis: **"All too often, a tragic and false dichotomy – analogous to the artificial rift between science and faith – has developed between the ethical teachings of our religious traditions and the practical concerns of today's business community. But there is a natural circularity between profit and social responsibility [...] The ethical dimension of social and economic interaction cannot be imported into social life and activity from without but must arise from within. This is, of course, a long-term goal requiring the commitment of all persons and institutions within society [...] You seek to form the conscience of leaders in the political, social and economic sectors. I encourage you to persevere in these efforts which contribute to the building of a global culture of economic justice, equality and inclusion"**.³

³ Address to the *Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice* international conference, 26th May, 2018, on line at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/may/documents/papa-francesco_20180526_centesimus-annus.html