

**Meditation offered by H.E. the Most Rev. Claudio Maria Celli
on the occasion of the 2016 International Conference
of the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation**

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Let us keep up the tradition and devote the first few moments of this opening morning to a brief meditation. I wish to underline that it will simply reflect what God says about the issues we will be debating.

I thought I would illuminate the path ahead of us with a quote from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 10. The text is very simple, let us read it together:

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ ; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live”. But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Dear friends, this morning I wanted to begin our meditation with the Lord Jesus’s very words because this simple parable teaches us how to rediscover what caring for our neighbor means, what we do mean when we talk about a culture of openness to the other. It will help us rediscover the meaning of sharing the grief, the problems of our neighbors. And - this is interesting - the Blessed Paul VI in his last speech at the closing of Vatican Council II said that the parable of the Good Samaritan was the truest and deepest spiritual expression of the Council’s whole work.

I was looking at the theme of our international conference: **“Business initiative in the fight against poverty: the refugee emergency, our challenge”**. If you think about it, some terms have a special bearing on our reflection. There is the word *initiative*, the word *business*, the words *fight against poverty* and *refugee emergency*, this latest the most pressing challenge of our times.

There is a reference point in our reflection. Increasing income inequality, even in the most developed countries, has become a primary issue in today’s world. One of our friends quoted Mrs. Lagarde - no need to tell you who she is - who recently said very forcefully *“one is not to be altruistic to support policies that will improve the income of poor and middle classes. Everyone will win because these policies are essential to make possible a more vigorous support and sustainable economic growth”*.

These are the words of a major player in the world of finance, not a spiritual meditation offered by a church official.

In this perspective I felt it would be interesting to go back on some concepts expressed by Pope Francis, which I would like you to use as a stepping point in your reflection on the themes our international conference is about to discuss.

We are talking in a European context, but some concepts are valid the world over. The temptation to conquer and dominate instead of promoting inclusion and transformation. The temptation to build barriers instead of promoting new dynamisms capable of involving, of enlisting, all social players, groups, individuals in the quest for new solutions.

The need to generate new processes is a theme dear to Pope Francis; if you reread *Evangelii Gaudium* it is spelled out very explicitly. It is typical of his thinking and it is what I wished to bring to your attention. Sometimes we do not know where some initiatives may lead us but generating new processes is very important.

So, I feel we should be talking about a new humanism. What does it mean to speak about a new humanism?

Pope Francis defines it as the product of three abilities: ability to integrate, ability to engage in dialogue, ability to generate. Retrenching, or the urge to make everybody like us, does not generate value; what is needed is integration based on solidarity, the only way to make history.

Here I must refer to a personal experience: as you probably know, I am in charge of a residence for university students where the focus is on talented youngsters from poor backgrounds. Even before Pope Francis invited us to pay special attention to the underprivileged we welcomed two refugee students – one from Afghanistan and one from Ethiopia – both Moslems. Imagine a residence set up in accordance with deeply Christian values hosting two Moslem university students.

What I can see, from firsthand experience, is this: yes they can play soccer together, they can play basketball together, which is already something, but there is more, there is an integration that goes deeper, that has cultural and human implications. Each one of these youngsters brings his or her personal history into play.

A few days ago I was talking to an Afghan boy whose father and uncle were killed by the Talebans and he was telling me: I do study but there are moments in which my head goes totally haywire.

Surely, the path towards integration is not easy, but building walls won't solve the problems. Which is why I talked about solidarity in the way we do things, the way we make history. Ability to engage in dialogue. Promoting a culture of dialogue, trying every possible way of opening up spaces where this can be brought about and the social tissue can be rebuilt. And - this is interesting - the Pope speaks of apprenticeship and asceticism. This is what I am choosing as the theme of our meditation. We need an apprenticeship in dialogue.

It is all too easy to put labels, to define and encapsulate a person. Haven't you noticed how difficult it is sometimes to engage in dialogue with our own family members? Listening instead of just talking? How many times have I heard things like: I find it hard to talk to my husband, to talk to my wife, I find it difficult to talk to my children.

This is why we are in need of asceticism, Pope Francis says. I notice it every day because there are situations that one does not understand at the first try, ongoing behaviours that have to do with style of life, inner life, the meaning of extending a helping hand.

Engaging in dialogue means creating a space which the other can enter, which helps us to recognize the other as a true interlocutor. If we are speaking of the refugee problem, a space that will allow us to look at the stranger, the migrant, the bearer of another culture as a human being deserving to be listened to, to be considered, to be appreciated.

Remember that beautiful speech Pope Benedict gave in Lisbon, to an audience of highly cultured people? The theme was exactly the same. Looking at the other not as somebody I must conquer or somebody I have to put up with. No, looking at the other as a source of wealth even for my own personal growth.

Allow me a quip, valid especially for us Italians: we do not need to be members of the "Lega" party to sympathize at times with their reactions; some such feelings are common to us all, they are part of our DNA. But we must promote a culture that privileges dialogue as a way of meeting the other, the other as a source of wealth for our own growth. We must have creativity; nobody can be a mere spectator, a mere onlooker.

It is interesting to reflect on the behaviour of that Samaritan, who takes care of the wounded and robbed man. We are all called upon to build this culture, day after day.

And now two words on the major role of the young. I say this not just because of my long experience in working with college students but because it is an irrefutable datum: their participation as true agents of change and transformation is essential. I think our Foundation should hold an event for the young, we should look for a suitable format to set up a dialogue between adults and the young because they are the ones who build the future.

One last word about the Church. There is something that always makes me wonder. The Pope said many times he has a dream - you have heard him say so - the Church as Mother. True, in olden times we used to speak of the Church as our Teacher, and I believe she should keep this role

because teaching is her function, but we have forgotten that the Church is a Mother, who holds our hand, walks with us, does not judge but meets us.

A mother may not approve our choices, but she keeps her door open for us, for our return.

I will give you a little example: I have a friend, a lawyer I have known since he was a kid: he is gay and is now living with a partner. One day I asked him: how are things at home? And he answered: my mother has accepted me as I am and has accepted also my partner. My father pretends he knows nothing.

A Church who is Mother, a Church who looks at men's wounds with compassion. She brings with her the strong and simple presence of Jesus, his mercy that consoles and encourages. I told you that this is a meditation, not a lesson: if I asked the question I think you would all raise your hands to say you are members of the Church. Well, only a Church made up of people ready to bear witness can offer the clear water of the Gospel to the contemporary man.

Paul VI said once something truly beautiful: that the Church today does not need teachers but people ready to bear witness. Today the young no longer look for teachers, they want people who bear witness. If they accept a teacher it is because he does bear witness.

I would like to conclude our reflection with this image: only a Church full of people who bear witness can offer the clear water of the Gospel to today's man, who walks thirsty along the arid roads of this world.

You know that for many years I was involved in the field of communication. Today we have impressive new communication technologies and yet man has never felt as alone There is a profound solitude and man needs once again this clear water, the clear water of the Gospel. Only a Church full of people ready to bear witness can provide it.

With this in mind I wish you success in your quest for the three things which Pope Francis so often advocates: a culture, an ability, to integrate, to engage in dialogue, to create.

A good day to you all.