

Fondazione Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice
2016 International Conference
BUSINESS INITIATIVE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY
THE REFUGEE EMERGENCY, OUR CHALLENGE
12-14 May 2016

An Economy towards Inclusive Growth

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One of the “signs of the times” or the actions of the Holy Spirit in the world and in the Church these past decades has been the concern to achieve genuine integral development of human beings, of societies and of the whole human family. The body of teaching that constitutes the Social Doctrine of the Church, especially these past six decades attests to this concern.

In 1967 Blessed Pope Paul VI published his encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio* (PP) on integral human development. The twentieth anniversary of its publication was marked by Saint Pope John Paul II with the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRS) that tried to apply to contemporary conditions the teaching of PP. A further twenty years later, in 2009 Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI devoted encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (CV) to a continuing reflection on PP which he calls the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age. Pope Benedict reminded us that the economic development envisioned by Paul VI was meant to produce real growth, of benefit to everyone and genuinely sustainable. For Paul VI economic growth must not be pursued in itself. Rather it must be integrated into a fuller development of the human being. He said in PP 20, “If further development calls for the work of more and more technicians, even more necessary is the deep thought and reflection of wise people in search of a new humanism which will enable modern people to find themselves anew by embracing the higher values of love and friendship, of prayer and contemplation. This is what will permit the fullness of authentic development, a development which is for each and all the transition from less human conditions to those that are more human.” These words need to be heard in our time when due to the swift exchange of information, we are compelled to provide quick answers and opinions without much thought, study and prayer. But true human development needs to cultivate the truly human capacities to think, reflect and pray.

John Paul II was quite disturbed by what he saw twenty years after PP as evidenced in his remark contained in SRS 14: “Looking at all the various sectors – the production and distribution of foodstuff, hygiene, health and housing, availability of drinking water, working conditions especially for women, life expectancy, and other economic and social

indicators – the general picture is a disappointing one, both considered in itself and in relation to the corresponding data of the more developed countries. The word ‘gap’ returns spontaneously to mind.”

Benedict XVI added in CV 21: “It is true that growth has taken place, and it continues to be a positive factor that has lifted billions of people out of misery – recently it has given many countries the possibility of becoming effective players in international politics. Yet it must be acknowledged that this same economic growth has been and continues to be weighed down by malfunctions and dramatic problems, highlighted even further by the current crisis.”

More recently, Pope Francis devoted a section to what he called an economy of exclusion in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) published in 2013. In number 53 he says, “Just as the commandment ‘thou shalt not kill’ sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape. Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the ‘exploited’ but the outcast, the ‘leftovers.’

Pope Francis’ observation is disturbing. Those who used to be on the margins or fringes of society have been pushed out. They are the persons excluded from the growth or development that the some countries and businesses have achieved. But if the majority of peoples are excluded from growth, we have to ask if the so-called growth is real. What type of growth would exclude the greater part of the human family and include a tiny fraction of it?

I would not pretend to offer solutions to these concerns that are now acquiring a particular face called the refugee emergency. If we allow a broader approach to the issue, avoiding the distinctions between a refugee and a forced migrant, we could very well include in the emergency situation the people displaced from their homelands not only by conflicts and terrorist activities but also by poverty and natural calamities. Unfortunately such forced movements of peoples have led to trafficking in human persons, new forms of slavery,

human smuggling, etc. – in other words, a multi-billion dollar or euro business. It is a shame that business thrives on the misery of other people. Indeed the children of this world are wiser in dealing with their own kind (see Lk 16: 8). But we have to ask, “What is the response of the children of light?” Let us trace some paths towards a response.

- I. A renewed vision of the human person, society, the economy and development.
 - A. A return to a view of life as gift, grace (with the primacy of gratuitousness) which is ignored in a consumerist, pragmatic, and utilitarian view of life. A exclusively functional vision of life convinces us wrongly that we are the source and author of ourselves, of human life, and of all aspects of society. Everything is about my achievement. Nothing is received, only achieved and better if attained single-handedly. Such a worldview eliminates gratitude, trust and genuine sharing. (See Mt 6: 32 where Jesus says, “All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given you besides.”). Even in family life, we have to ask whether spouses consider each other as gifts or as problems, or their children as burdens.

Gratuitousness and fraternity/sorority come together. Pope Benedict observes that present-day economic standards emphasize the value of commutative justice and rightly so. But he warns us that where giving and receiving is reduced to a transaction based on strict equivalence, it could lead to a forgetfulness of distributive and social justice rooted in solidarity. Contracts governing exchange between goods of equivalent value are necessary, but also just laws and forms of distribution of “gifts”. Genuine sharing and giving come only from brothers and sisters. We must also say that not all exterior acts of giving are altruistic. When done in view of controlling other people or holding them hostage to the giver, these acts are manipulative and violate the recipients.

One of my most harrowing experiences as a bishop was when I presided at a funeral liturgy of two children, aged six and five. They were siblings. They died after eating food picked up by their father from a garbage can near a restaurant. As a routine, the father went scavenging for food discarded by clients of restaurants whenever he failed to earn enough to buy food for his family. He boiled the “trash food”, spiced it up again and served to his family. That fateful evening, his two children got poisoned and died. What could you say to the family? How do you proclaim the Good News? In my mind a nagging question came, “Why does food have to become trash first before it is given to children? Why could it not be given as a gift and not as trash?”

- B. A return to faith in the Creator and our role as stewards. A steward respects the will of the true owner. A steward does not pretend to be the owner. A steward does not misuse or abuse the gift of creation. In *Laudato si*, Pope Francis calls for a conversion to integral ecology that links to environmental ecology and human ecology. He also invites us to exercise ecological justice as inter-generational justice. What type of world would we leave behind to the next generations? As good and faithful stewards of creation which is God's gift to all, we would be responsible in the way we use and develop the earth.
- C. A pursuit of the common good. Economic activity as an engine for wealth generation must be coupled with distributive justice in order to achieve the common good. From one perspective, the common good is the social environment within which individual persons and families can grow and develop to their full potentials. Thus the social environment is a common wealth or common treasure or common good. As we all need a healthy social environment to grow in, we all need to contribute to its development. Related to the pursuit of the common good is the Church's vision of the universal destination of the earth's goods. "See I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food." (Gen 1: 29). When God sees the hunger, the inequality and the waste of resources in our world, will God be able to say, "Everything is good."? Caritas in Veritate rightly reminds us that if profit is the ultimate end or goal of economic activity and not the common good, we would eventually destroy the wealth that we want to produce. Instead we would create and spread poverty.

II. The Inclusion of the People Presently Excluded.

- A. The pursuit of inclusive growth, when taken seriously, must be acted on in specific concrete ways. Who are the excluded? The outcast, the poor. For us the "poor" is not just a sociological or economic or political term, but also theological. In Deuteronomy 15:9 we are told, "The poor person might cry to the Lord against you and you would incur guilt."
- B. I propose that we all engage in an examination of consciousness as individuals and also as bodies or groups. Here are a few questions for our common examination of consciousness:
 - i. Are the poor included in our vision-mission statements? If a vision is supposed to lead an institution, then it must include the poor if the institution would want to end an economy of exclusion.
 - ii. Are the poor included in our goals and planning? How are they present? As commodities, consumers or partners?

- iii. Is the development of the poor a factor in deciding what items to produce or services to offer?
- iv. Are the poor consulted in the type of development that they desire? It is possible that in the zeal of experts and technocrats, they might impose their model of development on people who have their own needs and wisdom to respond to those needs. I remember how a business group wanted to purchase vast tracts of agricultural land from farmers in order to convert it to a resort with a golf course. The representative of the business group asked my help to convince the farmers that it would be advantageous to them and their families if started training themselves to become restaurant waiters and gold caddies. One wonders whose idea it is that being a restaurant waiter and golf caddy makes one a more developed human being than being a farmer.
- v. Is our corporate social responsibility an appendix to our corporate life or is it integrated in the way we do business so that business is itself an act of social responsibility? For example, corporations contribute to humanitarian relief efforts, but do they also contribute to the ecological and economic disasters that necessitate humanitarian action?
- vi. In our offices and establishments, are personnel and even administration people trained to deal with the poor? Are our labor practices fair to the poor among us, i.e. the low ranking workers? Do they enjoy security and stability?

III. The Need for Personal Encounter with the Excluded People.

- A. Pope Francis said that reality is greater than ideas. In *Laudato si* 49 he says, "It needs to be said that, generally speaking, there is little in the way of clear awareness of problems which especially affect the excluded. Yet they are the majority of the planet's population, billions of people. These days, they are mentioned in international political and economic discussions, but one often has the impression that their problems are brought up as an after-thought, a question which gets added almost out of duty or in a tangential way, if not treated merely as collateral damage. Indeed when all is said and done, they frequently remain at the bottom of the pile. This is due partly to the fact that many professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centers of power, being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor, with little contact with their problems. They live and reason from the comfortable position of a high level of development and a quality of life well beyond the reach of the majority of the world's population. This lack of physical contact and encounter, encouraged at times by the disintegration of

our cities, can lead to a numbing of conscience and to tendentious analyses which neglect parts of society.”

- B. The exclude are not categories or numbers but persons, like us, with feelings, dreams, hurts and thresholds. We come to the poor not in a condescending manner, from a position of superiority but from that of solidarity, even a posture of humble learning from their wisdom.

A few weeks ago I joined a commemoration of the first anniversary of the earthquake in Nepal. We visited villages that saw the horror of landslides, destruction of property and loss of lives. But the village people carried themselves with unbelievable grace and beauty. I noticed that it was already three o'clock in the afternoon but no lunch had been served yet. Then I realized that the community had very little food and scant drinking water. It was liberating for me to experience a bit of the hunger that these people bore every day with dignity. But although they could not spread a feast of food for us, they fed us with original poems and songs composed for the occasion, all recalling the nightmare of the earthquake and the love that Christians and Caritas organizations lavished on them. We are transformed by the poor.

Last October 2015 I visited the refugee camp in Idomeni, Greece along the border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It was an earth-shaking experience for me, an earthquake of sorts. During a pause in the distribution of relief goods, I talked with the lady vice-mayor of the town who also supervised the operations. I learned that the oversight of the camp was not part of her task as vice-mayor but volunteer work on her part. Surprised that a busy lady should take on additional work, I asked the reason for her decision to work in the camp. She responded, “My ancestors were refugees too. I have refugee DNA in my body. They are my brothers and sisters. I will not abandon them.”

- C. The pursuit of inclusive growth by business and the corporate world should begin with the “entry” of poor persons in our consciousness to disturb us, to teach us and to move us to action.

I end my sharing with a beautiful quotation from Blessed Pope Paul VI, PP 80: “We are all united in this progress toward God. We have desired to remind everyone how crucial is the present moment, how urgent the work to be done. The hour for action has now sounded. At stake are the survival of so many innocent children and, for so many families overcome by misery, the access to conditions fits for human beings; at stake are the peace of the world and the future of civilization. It is time for all peoples to face up to their responsibilities.”

Paul VI’s words written in 1967 retain their freshness and significance in 2016!