



Catholic Social Thought at a Time of Global Turmoil

Keynote Address by Archbishop Bernardito Auza,
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Dr. Sugranyes Bickel,
Father McShane,
Prime Minister Gonzi,
Professor Schwalbenberg,
Fellow Participants, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to be with you this afternoon as we reflect together on the themes involved in finding, following and helping economies, cultures, businesses and individuals to follow an ethical compass as we head further and further into the digital age “at a time of global turmoil.”

The March 6 edition of Forbes Magazine just brought us The 2018 List of the Three-Comma Club. In 2017, the world’s billionaires were 2,208, with an average net worth of 4.1 billion dollars. In just one year, their total net worth grew 18 percent. But even in this elite club, there is concern that the wealth gap among them tends to increase, that economic inequality among the wealthiest has been growing. The richest with his 112 billion dollars clearly distances the second who has “only” 90 billion, and the third richest with “only” 84 billion. In just one year, 2017, the richest person accumulated 39 billion dollars!

You would think that Mr. Rupert Murdoch is fabulously rich, yet he is “only” number 94 in this elite club and is worth “only” 15 billion dollars. President Trump is “only” number 766 in the list with his 3.1 billion. The poorest of the top 500 wealthiest persons

in the world is worth 4.3 billion dollars, and the poorest of the top 1,000 has “merely” 2.4 billion dollars.

How about in the level of countries? In 2017, the poorest country in the world had an annual per capita income of \$700 — that’s like as if an entire country lives in extreme poverty, below \$ 1.93 per capita/day — while the wealthiest was 200 times richer at almost \$140,000 annually, like a country in which every one of its citizens owns luxury homes with garages full of luxury cars.

Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have been asked to address the theme of “Catholic Social Thought at a Time of Global Turmoil.” Are we really in “a time of global turmoil?” There could be various answers to that question. A couple of weeks ago, I was invited to join a small group of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations in a dialogue on “Multilateralism under fire.” I noted that some of the Ambassadors present did not think that multilateralism is currently under fire, because, in spite of failures and inaction, much has also been achieved lately through multilateral bodies like the United Nations. They cited the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Accord, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and other significant documents. At the end of our discussions, however, most of those present were of the opinion, or supposed, that “multilateralism is under fire.”

The title given to me to address clearly presupposes that we see “a global turmoil” in our time. A reading of the papers of our speakers and main respondents in this conference has given me further inkling to shape my reflection against a backdrop of a world and time “in turmoil.”

The small sampling of data on economic inequalities I just mentioned is just one of those indicators and factors that indicate “a time of global turmoil,” with its “signs of the times” on which we are called to shed the light of the Catholic Social Teaching.

Moreover, in my service as Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, I feel constrained, as it were, to widen and raise my gaze beyond the economic aspect of this global turmoil. Indeed, at the United Nations, we come into contact almost every day with the upheavals persons and peoples across the world are facing, upheavals that are either consequences or causes and, oftentimes, both, of “economic turmoil.” I would just mention some of these upheavals:

- There’s the refugee and migration situation, with 258 million people crossing international borders, either as refugees seeking safety elsewhere or migrants of

every category, from economic migrants to “forced migrants” who do not fall under the legal definition of refugees. Another 40 million people are internally displaced within their own countries. So many on the move encounter closed doors and hearts, and an estimated 41 million persons have fallen victim to something worse: human trafficking and other contemporary forms of slavery.

- There are more known violent conflicts happening today than at any time in recorded history, or at least since the Second World War. As former United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon lamented toward the end of second mandate in 2016, there were thirteen open conflicts when he took office in 2016; ten years later there were 39 open conflicts and 11 situations that could explode into open conflicts. Coupled with this rise in the number of conflicts have been the increased barbarity of the crimes committed and the failure of those with the responsibility to protect people from atrocities to do so. A little less than 20 years ago, the Security Council, entrusted with sparing humanity from the scourge of armed conflict, met 52 times; in 2017, it met 292 times, thus indicating a “a world in turmoil.”
- There is the scourge of terrorism happening in areas where peace used to reign, and the rise of non-State terrorist groups has led to asymmetric wars and made peace more difficult to restore and maintain.
- Human rights are being trampled upon all across the board, from the unborn and frail seniors, to the poor and the excluded, to religious and ethnic minorities, to those ensnared by human traffickers for sex, labor or organ harvesting.
- There’s the breakdown of the family and its consequences on children raised without fathers, on single parents working multiple jobs just to survive, and on a culture in which, as Pope Francis has repeatedly stressed, the young fear lifetime commitments.
- There’s the growing polarization in political discourse across the globe, leading to deepening social disharmony and distrust between the citizens and their political leaders, and resulting in the fall of long-established political parties and the rise of new ones many of which are undergirded by extreme ideas.

- There's what Pope Francis calls an "ideological colonization" in which lifestyles and "values" are imposed upon developing regions in exchange for development aid.
- There's the "groaning" of our planet, as Pope Francis affirms in the Encyclical Letter "Laudato Si'," as our common home is harmed by environmental pollution and a culture of waste.

On the mainly economic dimension:

- There's the economic situation in which still more than one billion live in extreme poverty under \$1.93 a day, in which the gap between rich and poor continues to grow, in which so many people, especially the young, cannot find jobs or have lost jobs due to ever-increasing automation, and in which women are still fighting for equality of opportunity and pay for the same work.
- There's the technological revolution that is altering how we relate to each other, how we get information and how hackers and unscrupulous marketers steal private information, how we form community, even how kids are bullied and how people are manipulated or exploited without them knowing it, with new technologies arising so quickly that norms and strategies become obsolete even before they are implemented.

Confronted by this "global turmoil," I believe that some among the biggest questions before us are: What does Catholic Social Teaching offer in the midst of these deep agitations? Is it still relevant? Does it help diagnose and remedy the personal, social, economic, environmental, cultural and spiritual malaise and challenges at play? In what way can it enlighten the way toward a recalibration of the ethical compass for today's "world in turmoil?"

In the economic sphere, who or what could stop this ever-accelerating gap between the fabulously wealthy and the extremely poor? Who must regulate the forces underpinning this negative development? Has Catholic Social Teaching something to say and to what extent it can influence a new ethical compass to temper the forces that drive it? What can centers of learning like Fordham University and think tanks or organizations like the *Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation* do about it? What can Catholic Social Teaching suggest to educators, to business people, to political leaders? And what can it

propose to students and the young, to consumers and chain suppliers, to citizens and civic leaders in such a context?

While our distinguished and expert Speakers will attempt to give us answers to these questions, I will focus my reflection on affirming that Catholic Social Teaching can indeed offer principles and pathways to finding a fresh and effective ethical compass in a time of turmoil like ours.

I would thus affirm that the traditional categories and fundamental principles of Catholic Social Teaching remain relevant in responding to new phenomena, because so much of the turmoil comes from a disregard of fundamental principles of human relationships and the human person's relationship to things around him. New dominant forms or systems instrumentalize rather than respect the person. Individualism defeats solidarity. Selfishness destroys the common good. The here-and-immediately blurs intergenerational solidarity. Relativism knows no objective truth. I believe that Catholic Social Teaching has something relevant to say about these dominant realities of our time.

In order not to disperse my reflection too much, I would limit myself to a few points of reflection primarily applicable in the economic aspect of the "world in turmoil" I just described.

First, Catholic Social Teaching urges us to practice solidarity to fight an economic situation in which so few have so much and so many have so little or nothing.

Central in and to Catholic Social Teaching is solidarity with those in need. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that "the principle of solidarity, also articulated in terms of "friendship" or 'social charity,' is a direct demand of human and Christian brotherhood" (CCC 1939).

Solidarity, as we all know, is not an invention of the Church: It is a central teaching of the Gospel. Jesus teaches us that everything we have is gift: it does not belong to us; we are only stewards of God's gifts, to use them responsibly in the light of the needs of others and not just for our own enjoyment. To the religiously observant rich young man who wanted to be his disciple, Jesus said: "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have, and distribute it to the poor. You will have treasure in heaven. Come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). But perhaps there is nothing more explicit when it comes to underlining solidarity as an essential mark of a disciple of Christ than the Parable of the Last Judgment, in which Christ himself identifies with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned (Mt. 25:31-46).

The Acts of the Apostles demonstrates how strongly this teaching was felt in the nascent Christian community, telling us that “no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common (Acts 4:32-36). It was interpreted and implemented to the extreme that wretched Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, failed in the solidarity test, despite having laid most of the proceeds of the property they sold at the feet of the apostles, by retaining a part for themselves! (Acts 5:1-4).

Across two millennia, from the Fathers of the Church to the medieval theologians to Pope Francis, solidarity with those in need has remained a primary solicitude for the Church. The fourth century Father of the Church Saint John Chrysostom taught that not sharing your resources with others “is robbery and greediness and theft.” For Saint Thomas Aquinas, to whom we owe so much the idea of the common good, solidarity is ultimately a preparation and foundation for man’s eternal beatitude and the communion that exists among the saints.

Then comes along Pope Francis with some new vocabulary, some fresh formulation and imaginative ways of re-elaborating the Gospel and the Catholic teaching of solidarity. In the Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, the Holy Father exhorts us that “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... (50). This economy that “kills” and the “throwaway culture” that it begets are “no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new.... The excluded are not the ‘exploited’ but the outcast, the ‘leftovers’” (Idem.).

Asked to comment on his critique of trickle-down economy, the Pope’s response has relevance to the theme under consideration. He said in an interview: “The promise was that when the glass was full, it would overflow, benefitting the poor. But what happens instead is that when the glass is full, it magically gets bigger and nothing ever comes out for the poor.”

In a similar vein, we hear it often said that the tide lifts all boats. Concrete cases of poverty, especially extreme poverty, tell us, however, that the rising tide does not always lift all boats; often it only lifts the yachts, keeps a few other boats afloat, rocks and sweeps away many, and sinks the rest. The alarmingly increasing gap between the rich and the poor, between the haves and the have-nots, demonstrates this. Findings show that in 2017, 82 percent of the wealth created went to the one percent richest, while zero percent — nothing, *nada*, *nulla*, *rien de rien*, or *walang-wala* as we say in Pilipino— went to the world’s poorest 50 percent. In other words, in 2017 the tide lifted the yachts

of one percent of the world's population, and sank the little lifeboats of the world's poorest 50 percent.

Second, Catholic Social Teaching affirms that to prevent this growing economic inequality, the production and distribution of wealth cannot be left to unregulated market forces.

We have to question economic models that heighten exclusion and inequality, in particular those that cause an exponentially growing gap between the haves and the have-nots, those that exclude and marginalize masses of people without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape from poverty (see *Evangelii Gaudium* 53).

Pure market principles would determine the distribution of wealth in proportion to capital invested in the production of that wealth. Catholic Social Thought does not condemn that, but it insists that it should be exercised within a framework of other principles and values, such as solidarity, the common good and participation. Public authorities continue to have a determinant role in making sure that market forces are not totally left to their own logic, and must exercise it responsibly, in spite of the emergence of tremendously powerful non-State or non-public forces, like the huge high-tech companies that control much of the digital world and the sheer volume of private financial investments that dwarf the GDPs of so many countries.

Participation of as many as possible, if not all, in the economic activity is the antidote to economic exclusion, which too often begets social, political, cultural and other forms of marginalization. Structures and practices that exclude and leave behind large portions of the human family will always be barriers to full human development. Moreover, poverty is not mere exclusion from economic development; it is as multifaceted and multidimensional as the human person himself or herself. While economic exclusion underpins in a large measure these other forms of exclusion and poverty, we cannot equate poverty with economic poverty alone, lest we fail to grasp the complexity of the realities of poverty and human development.

Third, Catholic Social Teaching does not explicitly recommend a specific economic system; it rather considers how elements of economic models are more or less in consonance with the Church's vision of the human person and of work.

Pope Francis has been seen by some as anti-business and anti-capitalist, in particular for his critique of the prevailing economic system that "kills," as well as a pauperist and apologist of poverty, because of his constant advocacy for the poor. These are certainly caricatures of what the Holy Father has been saying and continually affirms. For one, in

the same document in which he criticizes an economy that “kills,” he also praises business, saying, “Business is a vocation, and a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life; this will enable them truly to serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all” (EG 203). He followed this up in his Message to the 2014 edition of the Davos World Economic Forum, in which he stated “Business is – in fact – a vocation, and a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life.”

What is this “greater meaning of life?” It means that one who engages in business does not only think of the profit he or she can accumulate through his or her business activity. It means that his or her business serves a bigger purpose other than his or her own aggrandizement. It means that the generation of wealth serves more effectively the common good and makes that good more equitably enjoyed by all, in particular among those who cooperate directly in the process. Expressed in more explicitly spiritual language, those who engage in business should see themselves as God’s co-creators, whose co-creation is “very good” and destined for a greater good beyond themselves.

I believe that it is in this sense that business leadership is indeed a calling, a vocation, a very noble role. Because of their role in the economic life of individuals, families and entire nations, business leaders who see their activity as a “vocation” would be guided and inspired by the “call “ to make their business respond to a “greater meaning of life.” That’s the business, I would even venture to say, that’s the “virtuous capitalism” that the Church takes joy in supporting.

Pope Francis’s new vocabulary and sometimes picturesque – indeed, provocative, perhaps sometimes intentionally so! — expressions, while consistent with the rich deposit of Catholic Social Teaching that has come before, inspire us in ways that could help us recalibrate the ethical compass suited for our “world in turmoil.” He has given us fresh terminologies that, I believe, more easily capture the attention and imagination of our contemporaries.

I think of the tremendous impact, just to cite one example, of *Laudato Si*, which definitely helped to create a real *entente cordiale* conducive to negotiations that led to the adoption of the Paris Accord. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis elaborates on the term “integral human ecology,” a thought that first originated in Pope Benedict’s *Caritas in Veritate*. The term provokes new ideas and emphasizes on the interconnectedness between nature and ourselves that clearly illustrates that a healthy environment means

healthy human beings, and that a “groaning” earth means a sick society with “suicidal tendencies.”

The principle of interconnectedness makes us more aware, too, of the intimate relationship between our lifestyles and modes of consumption and the fragility of our planet, of the value proper to each creature and its place in the scale of creation, of the anthropological and environmental consequences of a throwaway culture, of the need for intergenerational solidarity, *et cetera*.

This principle of interconnectedness inspires us to search for other ways to understand the economy and progress, to temper the ever-present temptation of wealth accumulation with fairness, generosity, gratuity, and, ultimately and over everything, love.

In the end, this principle of interconnectedness prods us on to the practice of the culture of encounter, of conversation, of conversion, of *caminar juntos*, of walking together, in response to the metastasizing isolation of the age despite all our digital super interconnectivity, in patiently and perseveringly recalibrating the ethical compass to make it fit for “a time of global turmoil” that is ours.

Thank you for your kind attention.