



Discourse of His Excellency, Mons. Paul Richard Gallagher,
Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See,
at the International Convention
of the *Foundation Centesimus Annus pro Pontefice*
“The Holy See’s international strategy at government level in an environment fraught
with new pandemic induced inequalities”

Rome, 22 October 2021

Your Excellencies, Honourable Civil Authorities, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Friends:

I am grateful to the *Foundation Centesimus Annus pro Pontefice* for the invitation to join you today at this year’s International Convention. In this particularly delicate moment, it is incumbent on Christians to come together to reflect soberly and seriously on the Church’s potential contribution in confronting the innumerable ills facing the world today. Since we believe that history has a meaning revealed to us in Christ, the Lord’s faithful are in a privileged position to offer paths forward that are invisible or impossible to the world.

I have been invited to speak on the topic of “The Holy See’s international strategy at government level in an environment fraught with new pandemic induced inequalities.” Since strategies make sense only in relation to the ends that they attempt to achieve, perhaps it is best to begin with those ends.

In his 1980 address to the Diplomatic Corps, St. John Paul II pointed to *Gaudium et Spes* as the inspiring principle of the Church’s dialogue with the political realm: “The Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system. She is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person.”¹ What is true for the Church as whole, *a fortiori* is true for the Holy See. This statement explains both the

¹ *Gaudium et Spes* 76.

Holy See's function in the international order and the nature of the Holy See's relations with the community of nations.

The Holy See's chief function in the international order is to be "a sign and a safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person." The Holy See is a sign insofar as it concretely lives out the conviction that "our citizenship is in heaven".² This gives a particular character to the composition of the Holy See's diplomatic staff, largely (but not exclusively) made up of priests who are trained primarily as priests before they are trained in the art of international relations. Further, because our mission comes from the One who is "the way and the truth and the life",³ the Holy See is bound to promote only that which results in the deepest and most complete flourishing of man, responding not only to his temporal needs, but also to those of his spirit. For this reason, Pope Francis noted in 2020, "peace and integral human development are in fact the principal aim of the Holy See in its involvement in the field of diplomacy".⁴ Where other States and international organizations are principally concerned with the natural end of man, the Holy See is primarily – but not exclusively – concerned with man's supernatural end. At times "a voice of one crying out in the desert",⁵ at times joined by a multilateral chorus, the Holy See seeks to defend the reality that each man is made *ad imaginem Dei*, that each person is known and loved personally by God, and that, in the immortal words of St. Irenaeus, "the life of man is the vision of God".⁶

Relating to the community of nations, the Holy See is simultaneously a citizen and foreigner. Citizen because it exhibits all of the juridical elements characteristic of a State: sovereignty, independence, self-organization, the capacity to relate with other States and to conduct international accords, etc. In this way, the Holy See engages with other States equals and brothers. However, in view of its particular function, the Holy See does not act in the pursuit of its own prerogatives or interests (apart from safeguarding the independence of the Holy Father), rather it seeks the interests of all of humanity, and of the Christian community in particular. It seeks the good of man wherever he may be found. Thus, the Holy See is not bound to or identified with any political system or community. Rather, it is bound to and identified with man and with mankind.

That global vision allows us to descend into the Holy See's strategy. In the 1969 apostolic Letter on the Office of the Representatives of the Roman Pontiff, *Sollicitudo*

² Phil 3:20.

³ Jn 14:6.

⁴ Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 9 January 2020.

⁵ Mk 1:3.

⁶ *Adv. Haer.* 4.20.7.

Omnium Ecclesiarum, St. Paul VI wrote that “the good of the individual and of the community of peoples requires an open dialogue and a sincere understanding between the Church on one hand and the State on the other”. These two elements constitute the fundamental strategy of the Holy See in all international relations. An open dialogue is necessary because “the human family’s innate vocation [is] to fraternity”.⁷ Fraternity cannot be had except by sharing one’s mind, one’s thoughts, one’s desires and fears. We seek active dialogue with all because the Church is Mother to all men, and the Holy See is brother to all States. We hope that this dialogue leads to a sincere understanding between interlocutors, not for the sake of “compromising our own identity but as an occasion of mutual understanding and enrichment”.⁸

In view of the Holy See’s commitment to a universal strategy of dialogue and understanding, we must pass to the particulars of our day. In this year’s address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, Pope Francis identified five crises that were provoked or brought to light by the pandemic: a health crisis, an environmental crisis, an economic and social crisis, a crisis of politics and a crisis of human relationships.

The health crisis is characterized by a growing movement of legal systems “moving away from their inalienable duty to protect human life at every one of its phases”.⁹ It is not enough to care for the “productive” members of society, the unborn and the elderly must be a focus of our special attention. We must also continue to secure the right to dignified care, one guided not by profits but by the unalienable dignity of each human. As a consequence of the principle of the universal destination of goods,¹⁰ scientific advances cannot benefit only developed nations. This is true especially concerning the equitable distribution of vaccines.

Further, the pandemic has brought to the fore new aspects of the environment crisis. “The impact of climate change, for example, whether direct, such as the extreme weather events of flooding and drought, or indirect, such as malnutrition or respiratory disease, entail consequences that persist for a considerable time.”¹¹ Just as in the case of the pandemic, these issues cannot be reduced to a single country or region, for what happens in one place will soon bear its unhappy fruit in others. As Pope Francis previously wrote in the encyclical *Laudato Si’*, “there are no frontiers or barriers,

⁷ *Fratelli Tutti* 26.

⁸ Francis, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 8 February 2021.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2403-2405; *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 171-172.

¹¹ Francis, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 8 February 2021.

political or social, behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalization of indifference.”¹²

In the socio-economic sphere, restrictions on the freedom of movement have devastated economies, especially small and midsize companies and those working informally. Moreover, already precarious humanitarian catastrophes have worsened and new ones have emerged. While many nations have attempted to alleviate their citizen’s situations through direct payments or substantially increasing the money supply, local solutions will never suffice for a global problem. “The current crisis thus provides a helpful opportunity to rethink the relationship between individuals and the economy”¹³ by which we can collaborate to put the economy at the service of men and women, of families and of communities, not vice-versa.

The political crisis that we are experiencing has manifested an increasing inability to agree on much of anything. Internationally, we note “the difficulty, if not actually the inability, to seek common and shared solutions to the problems afflicting our world”.¹⁴ There is increasing suspicion of the ability of international organizations to achieve their aims. Nationally, democratic values erode in countries where citizens are increasingly limited in expressing their political views and leaders are increasingly brazen in imposing their will. I need not mention the various crises still smoldering (such as Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Afghanistan, Venezuela, the Holy Land and Libya), the continued plight of migrants and displaced persons, or the globalization of terrorism.

The last crisis, of human relations, deals “with the very conception of the human person and his or her transcendent dignity.”¹⁵ The pandemic has imposed long periods of isolation and loneliness, not dissimilar to what the 14th-century papal physician Guy de Chauliac reportedly said of the bubonic plague, “Father would not visit son, nor son, father; charity was dead, and hope prostrate.” The education of our youth has been disturbed in calamitous ways. Under the guise of halting the virus, governments have abridged fundamental rights of man, including the freedom of worship.

Your Excellencies, Honourable Civil Authorities, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Friends,

¹² *Laudato Si’* 52.

¹³ Francis, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 8 February 2021.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

While each of these crises requires a response calibrated to the specific situation, the Holy Father has proposed two elements as indispensable to overcoming them: fraternity and hope. Clearly, these are not “strategies” in the political sense of the word, empty instruments to achieve an end. The Catholic tradition does not rest on the employment of political strategies, but in the promotion of an ascending ladder of goods, each leading to an ever-deepening human flourishing. These goods – fraternity and hope – both perfect man and lead him to the achievement of the highest goods.

Fraternity identifies in the other not simply an equal or a friend, but a brother for whom I have responsibility. Perhaps it goes a bit further than solidarity insofar as it bases its care for the other on a true affection that arises from shared experience, shared suffering, shared desire and shared response. Thus, as it derives from a quasi-familial affection, fraternity goes beyond the solidarity that founds itself more so on the theoretical equality of persons. Building on the natural bonds of peoples and the supernatural bonds of the Church, the Holy See seeks to build this fraternal affection specifically by bringing together actors and communities, which otherwise would have little to do with one another in order to approach common issues and to heal historical wounds. Pope Francis has actively sought to facilitate this feeling of fraternity in his own Pontificate, as can be seen through the rapprochement brokered between the United States and Cuba in 2014, the “Rome Declaration” of 2019 between South Sudanese leaders and his historic trip to Iraq in March of this year. He has sought to do the same in the ecumenical and inter-religious spheres, as can be seen both from his 2016 meeting and subsequent joint declaration with His Holiness Kirill, the Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, as well as from the 2019 Apostolic Journey to the United Arab Emirates, in which together the Holy Father and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb produced the document on *Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*.

I would like to conclude, as perhaps is fitting, with the second good that is essential to overcoming the current situation, which is hope. By hope, we identify what is good, and even though it may be arduous to obtain, we carry forward in the conviction that we will finally arrive at it. This virtue gives men strength, courage and fortitude. Hope allows man to suffer great calamities without breaking, for he knows that there will be a way out, he knows that something better awaits him. As *Gaudium et Spes* begins “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”¹⁶ Exactly for this reason, the Holy

¹⁶ *Gaudium et Spes* 1.

See is insistent in recalling what is great about man, what ennobles him, his rights and responsibilities, and his highest calling beyond this world. When the Holy See seeks to defend in the international fora all those who suffer, those who are oppressed or otherwise wronged and have no voice – even if such appeals at times seem vain – it is precisely to protect the hope of these same people: that they know they are not forgotten, that they know they are loved. Love, in the end, is the virtue adjacent to hope. Anyone who is loved knows hope and anyone who knows God knows that He is loved. Thus, the Holy See guards the religious liberty of all believers and the freedom of the Church in the world so that the message of God’s love may never be absent and so that the truest and most profound source of our hope may never be far from those who seek him.

Thank you for your attention.