

Solidarity, Cooperation and Responsibility: the antidotes to fight injustices, inequalities and exclusions

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Allow me to rephrase the title into: “*From injustices, inequalities and exclusions to Solidarity, Cooperation and Responsibility*”. Our task is indeed not solely to statically analyze the situation in our world, but to change it for the better. As Karl Marx said: “The philosophers till now have only interpreted the world differently, it is, however, necessary to change it.”¹ We as members of CAPP are invited to participate in this paradigm shift at all levels, lead also by other principles of Catholic Social Teaching, like human dignity, subsidiarity, the common good and sustainability.

This fits in well with the literal genre of a meditation, like this one, in which one is not only concerned with a general picture of what is wrong with the world and how “one” should change it. Rather, our goal is to clarify what our analysis all means for each of us, for me, personally. In seminary we learned a meditation-technique: put yourself into the stories of Jesus in the gospel, and look at the persons... see who they are, what they say, what they do... and then identify yourself with them where you feel fitting. Next, discern where you feel at home, but also where God calls you to change. An example: in what way I can identify with the vocation of the rich young man to leave everything behind...? In this way, we are always called to personal conversion...

About this conversion our holy father St. John Paul II stated in his *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), 38:

“For Christians, as for all who recognize the precise theological meaning of the word ‘sin’, a change of behavior or mentality or mode of existence is called ‘conversion’, to use the language of the Bible (cf. Mk 13:3, 5, Is 30:15). This conversion specifically entails a relationship to God, to the sin committed, to its consequences and hence to one's neighbor, either an individual or a community. It is God, in ‘whose hands are the hearts of the powerful’ and the hearts of all, who according his own promise and by the power of his Spirit can transform ‘hearts of stone’ into “hearts of flesh”” (cf. Ez. 36:26).

“Improve the world, start with yourself...” we say in the Netherlands. Will we leave this conference as other persons?

Along the theme of our conference, how can we get clarity on the core of personal conversion we need according to our subject? I would suggest that the common denominator of going from Injustices, Inequalities and Exclusions to Solidarity, Cooperation and Responsibility, both on a personal as well as a general level, is the way we deal with the I. The first three terms are related to a self-centered I, whereas the latter three concepts are to a connected to a mature, self-giving I... In this way we grow from a egocentric to an allocentric person. The I-Tyrant² becomes an I-Servant.

¹ „Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert, es kommt darauf an, sie zu verändern.“ 11th *Thesis on Feuerbach* (1845), published by Engels in 1888..

² Cfr. the interesting analysis of Éric Sadin, *L'ère de l'individu tyran* (2020)

Now, concretely, how can our hardened heart change into a generous heart of merciful love...? Everyone who tried it, knows this is not easy... Egocentrism has been in humanity since Adam and Eve. Some biologists even speak of *The Selfish Gene*... Since modern times the “I”, or “consciousness”, has been a central subject. It’s always your private perspective with which you think and act... It nice to think of me, me, me... which was cleverly used by companies into I-phone, I-pad, I-pod... In his plea for ecological renewal. Pope Francis names a special feature of this egocentrism: Anthropocentrism... (*Laudato Si, Fratelli tutti*)

Our conversion might start of with contemplating the great ideals in the title of our conference:

Solidarity... CA 10: “In this way, what we nowadays call the **principle of solidarity**, the validity of which both in the internal order of each nation and in the international order I have discussed in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), is clearly seen to be one of the fundamental principles of the Christian view of social and political organization. This principle is frequently stated by Pope Leo XIII, who uses the term "**friendship**", a concept already found in Greek philosophy. Pope Pius XI refers to it with the equally meaningful term "**social charity**". Pope Paul VI, expanding the concept to cover the many modern aspects of the social question, speaks of a "**civilization of love**".”

Johannes Paulus II, *Encyclical Letter Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38-40: loc. cit., 564-569; cf. also John XXIII, *Encyclical Letter Mater et Magistra*, loc. cit., 407. Leo XIII, *Encyclical Letter Rerum Novarum*: loc. cit., 114-116; Pius XI, *Encyclical Letter Quadragesimo Anno*, III, loc. cit., 208; Paul VI, *Homily for the Closing of the Holy Year* (December 25, 1975): AAS 68 (1976), 145; *Message for the 1977 World Day of Peace* (January 1, 1977): AAS 68 (1976), 709. Also St. Johannes Paulus II speaks *passim* of the culture of love... Pope Francis of the brotherhood of all.

Fratelli Tutti 79 speaks of responsibility: “The Samaritan who stopped along the way departed without expecting any recognition or gratitude. His effort to assist another person gave him great satisfaction in life and before his God, and thus became a duty. All of us have a **responsibility** for the wounded, those of our own people and all the peoples of the earth. Let us care for the needs of every man and woman, young and old, with the same fraternal spirit of care and closeness that marked the Good Samaritan.”

Fratelli tutti 127 is just one instance of a text regarding cooperation: “For a real and lasting peace will only be possible ‘on the basis of a global ethic of **solidarity and cooperation** in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family’.”

Conversion on the basis of solely contemplating these great principles of CST, however, seems not plausible... All who tried know... The context of people behaving differently in our times do not help either: humanity in general is still very self-centered... Look at what’s in the news every day... Few good examples are given.

In order to get out of our prison of the ego, it is not enough to go through a cognitive therapy, on a psychological level. In Galatians 5, the self-centered spirit is opposed to the Holy Spirit. Ours is a spiritual battle against the forces of darkness... (Cfr. Ef. 6,10-20). Just an example. Once I met a Satanist at a pro-life conference. He showed me the Satanic Bible, written by a high priest of satanism LaVey... In it, he presents himself an I-theist, not an a-theist... Main commandment in this “Bible”, opposed to the Divine commandment of love, was not: make war, isolate, torture, make people to suffer, but: “Think a little more about yourself.” Of course, the negative results will follow automatically...

So how do we fight our wrong mentality and attitude...? How do we force ourselves to go outside our personal bubbles, outside our families, tribes, provinces, countries, continents, to live responsibly in solidarity and cooperation and grow in empathy with real others, the unknown? How do we experience finding our real selves in serving instead of being served (Mt. 10,39; 16,25), in giving instead of grasping, in losing our lives for our friends, instead of using them for our wellbeing?

Maybe we should zoom in... St. Paul, in 1 Timothy 6,10, states: *Radix malorum est cupiditas* or *Radix omnium malorum est cupiditas*: “The root of all evil is greed.” It has frequently been rendered as: “Money is the root of all evil.”

The answer to our existential question of how to attain freedom, not only *from* attachment, but also *in order to* give, we may find in a little movie: “How to catch a Monkey...”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IpJmpClJi4E>

How is the grip of the monkey released?

First, there is the hard way... The hunter pushes a nerve, and the monkey has to relax his muscles... Also in our lives, things are sometimes taken from us the hard way, e.g. when things we keep tight get stolen. Or, we become sick, and cannot use our precious objects anymore. Our valuta devaluates... The stocks and bonds evaporate... It is the confrontation with the (hard) truth that sets us free... (cfr. Joh. 8.32).

This is the most common way to force people to release their obsessive grip on thing: through a personal or collective (life) threatening experience. Warnings about the (expected) *consequences* of being too egoistic changes our behavior: the prediction of a disaster that might lead to injury or even death may strengthen cooperation and feeling responsible for one another... (Cfr. the preaching of Jonah in Ninivé.)

Even the famous psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) first topped his famous pyramid of basic needs with self-actualization... later, after more life experiences, he added self-transcendence as an even higher value...³ He too noted that the “I” is too small a world, too closed a house, in which poisonous molds will grow when we do not open the windows...

In an interesting interview with Kahn Straus during the free fall of Fall of Leeman brothers and other banks, he mentions the fact that the boards of banks involved confessed their addiction to greed only in case of danger and only then begged the minister of finance: “Please, regulate us” (<https://youtu.be/T2IaJwkqgPk?t=4800>). Later, when the danger subsided, they didn’t ask for these regulations anymore...

But, secondly, there is a more convenient and friendly way to become free from ourselves... which is the loving grace of Jesus. Christ has set us free... (Gal. 5,1). We may receive his liberating power... In fact, growing in freedom is not possible without Gods redeeming grace...

³ Cfr. A. Maslow, *The farther reaches of human nature* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971); Mark E. Koltko-Rivera, “Rediscovering the Later Version of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: Self-Transcendence and Opportunities for Theory, Research, and Unification”, in: *Review of General Psychology* 10(2006)4, pp. 302-317 (<http://academic.udayton.edu/jackbauer/Readings%20595/Koltko-Rivera%2006%20trans%20self-act%20copy.pdf>)

Centesimus anno, nr. 13 states: “If we then inquire as to the source of this mistaken concept of the nature of the person (...), we must reply that its first cause is atheism. It is by responding to the call of God contained in the being of things that man becomes aware of his transcendent dignity. Every individual must give this response, which constitutes the apex of his humanity (...) The denial of God deprives the person of his foundation, and consequently leads to a reorganization of the social order without reference to the person's dignity and responsibility.”

Indeed, in the gospel of Marc (10,17-31), in which the evangelist recounts how the rich young man went away from Jesus when he was asked by Him to leave everything behind, there was a crucial moment the guy missed: Jesus looked at him lovingly (vs. 21). If he would have stayed in that gaze of Jesus, he would have found the strength to bear the pain of leaving everything behind... If we stay in the love of God, and believe in Him, everything is possible (cfr. Mc. 9,23).

So, our Christian method of opening up the prison of the I is putting ourselves in the loving gaze of Jesus. Compare it to sitting or laying in the sun or under an infrared lamp. Our cramped thoughts, feelings and muscles relax when we put ourselves in the Sun of love that He is. This can happen during a silent time in which He is present, especially while adoring the Blessed Sacrament, and in meditation and prayer... Prayer like the rosary.... A beautiful example of the liberating power of this wonderful rosary prayer happened in Austria after WW II with the rosary-crusade that was started on febr. 2th 1947 by Fr. Petrus Pavlicek (1902-1982), during which through the collective prayer of millions of Austrians the Russian occupying forces retreated without a fight in May 1955...⁴

From the love and freedom that we experience in prayer we can then freely share, and go our common path on our syn-hodos through time... From the power of that love we can really miss much more than we would first believe...

Our Pope Francis, in his sermon on oct. 10th here in Rome at the opening-celebration of the synodal process, mentioned our strategy to spread that love by summarizing it's way: 1. Really Encountering people (this means: getting out of our bubble), 2. Listening (in Dialogue) and 3. (Communal) Discernment.

May God's love lead us on that path... towards solidarity, cooperation and responsibility.

⁴ Cfr. <https://www.eurozine.com/the-soviet-occupation-of-austria-1945-1955/> for the historical facts. Cfr. <https://www.schooloffaith.com/rosary-archive/petrus-pavlicek-and-the-rosary-crusade> for the religious interpretation, like also: <https://www.catholicmom.com/articles/2015/10/08/the-miracles-and-the-power-of-the-rosary-in-our-fight-against-evil>