



Discourse of His Eminence, Cardinal Pietro Parolin,
Secretary of State of the Holy See,
at the International Convention
of the *Foundation Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice*

***“Solidarity, cooperation and responsibility: the antidotes to fight
injustices, inequalities and exlusions”***

Rome, 23 October 2021

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

I am honoured to have the occasion once again this year, to offer a few remarks at the conclusion of this important annual conference of the *Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice* Foundation.

The great “civilization of love”,¹ inaugurated by Christ and so desired by the saints, finds its source and completion in the kingdom of God the Father, from whom descends every good endowment and perfect gift.² Indeed, it is in the contemplation of divine realities and promises that we come to see not only how we are to live, but also what and who we are. We are those who have been loved “before the foundation of the world”,³ “we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”.⁴

In days such as these, of no small amount of trial and uncertainty, it is good for us Christians to reflect on such things, for they give us hope. They allow us to trust in the words of the Psalmist, “he will deliver you from the snare of the

¹ St. Paul VI, Homily, 25 December 1975.

² James 1:17.

³ Eph 1:4.

⁴ Rom 8:16-17.

fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions and under his wings you will find refuge”.⁵

While the pandemic is not yet over and many people still labour under its affliction, it appears as though we may have arrived at a point where we can look forward and begin to consider not only what the future has in store, but what we can do to contribute to a more humane, or dare I say, a more Christian future. By a Christian future, I mean one that better reflects that glorious communion of joy in heaven where “he will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, (for) the old order has passed away”.⁶

It is grace that makes it possible for us not only to hope for that sublime yet unseen destiny, but also to begin to live it – albeit imperfectly – and to offer to others a taste of that peace which is beyond the world’s offering. A peace infused with Christ’s grace is one that results from the charity of God that “has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit”.⁷

This is what marks, I believe, the unique contribution of the Church to the discussion of solidarity. Solidarity, according to the criteria of the world, is the child of justice, that “constant and firm will to render to every man his due”.⁸ However, experience has taught that our own estimation of what is due to another is often contingent on ideologies, political expedience, the history of relations between communities, or worse, on the shifting sands of power and desire. Christian solidarity, on the other hand, is the daughter of charity, and thus has God as its author and guarantor. Christian solidarity asks not “What is right for me to render?” but rather “How can I love more perfectly?” Earthly solidarity has an uncertain foundation, while Christian solidarity reaches to heaven.

Moreover, since we are aware of the Lord’s admonition, “without me you can do nothing”⁹, Christian solidarity resists the temptations both of an earthly utopianism and of an increasingly severe culture that – in the attempt to create a more inclusive society – ends up simply excluding those who do not submit to their views. In the name of justice, a deceptive justice though it may be, many offenses against human dignity have been excused. In fact, addressing and

⁵ Ps 90:3-4.

⁶ Rev 21:4.

⁷ Rom 5:5.

⁸ Ulpian, *Dig.* 1.1.10.

⁹ Jn 15:5.

correcting these errors, generally born from false anthropologies, has been the scope of many of the great social encyclicals of the Church.

The 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, a fundamental pillar in the construction of the Church's social model, sought to defend the inherent dignity of human person, resisting the Marxist vision by which humans are valued only in terms of production and all can be condensed to class struggle. While not making an explicit reference to solidarity, Leo XIII proposed the *principle of collaboration*,¹⁰ understood as a suitable tool to promote social change in favour of justice, the dignity of the poor and the rights of the weak. The *principle of collaboration*, in fact, is simply another way of expressing what today we would call solidarity.

Forty years later, in *Quadragesimo anno*, Pius XI reiterated the need for a healthy collaboration and solidarity in achieving the common good.¹¹ The same Pontiff, in the encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*, warned of the dangers of totalitarian and atheistic visions, promoting the renewal of Christian life through the exercise of charity and the fulfilment of duties of justice at the interpersonal and social levels as the principal means to stem the evils produced by atheistic communism.

In the Conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council highlighted how in the category of solidarity can be expressed both the very mystery of the Incarnation¹² and all the service that the Church owes to man.¹³ They further reaffirmed that social solidarity frees man from selfishness and individualism.¹⁴

St. Paul VI's 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio* offers a significant advance to the concept of human solidarity, associating it with an integral development of man. The true progress of humanity, the Pontiff affirmed, cannot be limited to merely economic and technical dimensions, but requires that each person obtain a cultural formation, respect the dignity of others, and recognize "the highest values and God Himself, their author and end".¹⁵ Thus, Paul VI sees

¹⁰ *Rerum Novarum* 36

¹¹ *Quadragesimo anno* 58.

¹² GS 32.

¹³ GS 3.

¹⁴ GS 30.

¹⁵ *Populorum Progressio* 21.

the expansion of the heavenly City as a condition of the progress of the earthly City.

Marking the centenary of *Rerum Novarum*, St. John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus Annus* sought to elaborate even further the principle of solidarity and to promote it as an interpretive key both for the Church's own mission and activity and for the promotion of a Christian vision within social and political life. Solidarity, he writes, is fundamentally rooted in the proper understanding of the spiritual dimension of our human nature: "When man does not recognize in himself and in others the value and grandeur of the human person, he effectively deprives himself of the possibility of benefitting from his humanity and of entering into that relationship of solidarity and communion with others for which God created him. Indeed, it is through the free gift of self that man truly finds himself. This gift is made possible by the human person's essential 'capacity for transcendence'. Man cannot give himself to a purely human plan for reality, to an abstract ideal or to a false utopia. As a person, he can give himself to another person or to other persons, and ultimately to God, who is the author of his being and who alone can fully accept his gift. A man is alienated if he refuses to transcend himself and to live the experience of self-giving and of the formation of an authentic human community oriented towards his final destiny, which is God".¹⁶ He points to solidarity as a means of overcoming wars and extinguishing those political forms that threaten the good of societies and individuals.¹⁷

In *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI affirms that solidarity is primarily a matter of acknowledging that everyone is responsible for everyone, and it cannot be delegated to the competence of the State alone.¹⁸ International organizations are also called to make the principles of equality and solidarity their own. The Pope further affirms that solidarity is an instrument for the building up of the human family, and is relevant not only in sectors of economics, politics and culture, but also in the environmental and ecological spheres.¹⁹ The Pontiff further examines the inseparable connection between the two principles of subsidiarity and solidarity: subsidiarity without solidarity falls into social particularism, while solidarity without subsidiarity falls into welfarism that

¹⁶ *Centesimus Annus* 41.

¹⁷ *Centesimus Annus* 29.

¹⁸ *Caritas in Veritate* 38.

¹⁹ *Caritas in Veritate* 48.

humiliates the needy.²⁰ The encyclical calls for the building of a more participatory social solidarity.

More recently, in *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis has underlined the necessarily personal nature of solidarity when he wrote that it “finds concrete expression in service, which can take a variety of forms in an effort to care for others. And service in great part means ‘caring for vulnerability, for the vulnerable members of our families, our society, our people’”.²¹ At the same time, he recognizes that the call to solidarity and cooperation will not always be well received in the world: “Solidarity is a word that is not always well received; in certain situations, it has become a dirty word, a word that dare not be said. Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few.”²² Pope Francis underscores the necessity of solidarity and cooperation to overcome the “dark clouds” which shadow our world: “the true path of peace, not the senseless and myopic strategy of sowing fear and mistrust in the face of outside threats... 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”.²³

Thus, Christian solidarity seeks the true good of the other and seeks not only to assist others in their physical and psychological needs, but also their spiritual and religious ones and to free them from those ideologies which tend to demean and entrap the human person in a horizon that is limited and beneath it. Man is neither the sum of his production and consumption, nor an instrument of the State nor merely a member of a nameless and faceless society. Man is a creation of God’s love, individually known and cared for, placed in society so that man might learn to grow to the full stature of Christ.

As a corollary, Christian solidarity – based as it is in charity – has for its proximate object a real, living person. Surely, it is also concerned with classes, peoples and nations, but as extensions of real persons and communities. This is why in earlier expressions Leo XIII explained solidarity in terms of *friendship*

²⁰ *Caritas in Veritate* 58.

²¹ *Fratelli Tutti* 115.

²² *Fratelli tutti* 116.

²³ *Fratelli tutti* 127.

and *brotherly love*.²⁴ Programs and institutions can certainly facilitate friendship, as I hope that this Conference has done for you in these days.

Dear friends, we are living in a time of great vulnerability, suffering and isolation. This has been brought on not only by the pandemic, but also by sin, a loss of a sense that God is with us and cares for us, and the innumerable societal ills that plague our world. In this context, it is our duty and our privilege to be the face of the living and loving God, lest some “living and dying in this world without God, are exposed to final despair”.²⁵ These illnesses cannot be resolved by social programs and just laws alone. These reach into the heart of man and require a response that similarly reaches into our hearts. For that, closeness is required. Friendship is required. Love is required.

That is why it is not enough for us to come up with plans and studies that result in new programs, initiatives and institutions. These things can certainly do some good, but they are incapable of providing precisely that thing which the Church alone can offer to the world: the presence of Christ and the closeness of God. These gifts cannot be mediated through organizations; they must be carried from person to person, handed on as a gift from one to another. In addition to the way they are offered in the Sacraments, they are made manifest in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. As the king said to the righteous, “whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me”.²⁶ We must personally aid the poor, feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

The Lord Jesus says to us, “You are the light of the world”.²⁷ We can only illuminate this age’s darkness by reflecting the radiance of the Son of God, and that, only if He dwells within us to enlighten us. I have heard it said that only the saints will change the world. While I do not wish to lessen the good work that is and has been done by so many, there is a truth in that statement that is worth emphasizing. The saints are nothing other than those who have been so consumed by Divine Love that they cannot but transmit that Love to others. The saints cannot but love. That is our goal, to be recreated by Love, into Love, for Love. That Love, of course, is God, “for God is love”.²⁸

²⁴ *Rerum Novarum* 25.

²⁵ *Lumen gentium* 16.

²⁶ Mt 25:40.

²⁷ Mt 5:14.

²⁸ 1 Jn 4:8.

In your ongoing efforts as members of this Foundation, I invite you seek sanctity so that all that you do will be permeated with God and all that you meet will see Christ who dwells within the heart of the one who loves. We must pray regularly with humility that God grant all of us the grace to be able to collaborate worthily with His plans, not our own. I invite you to not be content with the dictates of mere justice, but to “pursue love”²⁹ as your aim. I invite you to roll up your own sleeves and aid those in need with your own hands and with your own presence.

Thank you and may God bless you.

²⁹ 1 Cor 14:1.