



Address of His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin
Secretary of State
to the
Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation
International Conference

8 October 2022

Dear Friends,

Allow me first of all personally to thank each one of you for your invaluable contribution in disseminating the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church and in promoting the presence and work of the Catholic Church in the various spheres of society, including the help you give to the Holy See.

After having heard the Message of Pope Francis, I would like to provide a few reflections on the topic of this year's International Conference "*Inclusive growth to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development and peace.*" As Pope Francis explained, to address world problems and respond to injustice we need the mind, the heart and the hands of the people of good will. Much work still needs to be done to make the Social Doctrine of the Church known and understood on issues like poverty eradication, integral development and lasting peace. The "poverty" of our times is not represented only by the economically poor. There is poverty in knowledge, in interpersonal relationships and in vision for the future. This poverty can be eliminated through education and the dissemination of the Social Doctrine of the Church, which by nature gives hope.

These last few years have tested humanity in many ways, especially the threat arising from the Corona virus that left behind many victims. During the pandemic, despite difficulties, we saw the mobilization of joint efforts by Governments, religious institutions and the private sector to bring the advancement of the virus to a halt. As a result, in only a few months, with the aid of new technologies, we were provided with vaccines to counter the spread of the virus.

Together with the plight of the pandemic, we saw the arising, or better the dissemination of another scourge: war. Similar to Covid, but driven by culpable human choices, war creates innocent victims while driving uncertainty, not only for those directly affected by it, but in a much more widespread and indiscriminate way.

Unfortunately, we have in front of our eyes, and at the door of many of our brothers and sisters, the latest insurgence of the horrific menace of armed conflict,

the war in Ukraine. There, we are witness to an unknown number of victims, surpassed only by the number of displaced persons. Surely, this is not the post-Covid era we hoped for or expected.

As humanity, we need to go back to basics. This means that we must recognise, once again, that we are one human family and obliged, in a spirit of charity, to care for one another. This principle should be translated at all levels, including interpersonal and intergovernmental relationships as well as throughout the private sector, at both the level non-profit organizations and for-profit businesses.

To achieve this we need a change of heart, attitudes, lifestyles and policies. “Otherwise, political propaganda, the media and the shapers of public opinion will continue to promote an individualistic and uncritical culture subservient to unregulated economic interests and societal institutions at the service of those who already enjoy too much power.”¹

Whenever we join efforts, we can achieve great things, including in a limited amount of time. Just as forces were joined to combat Covid, the same needs to be done to combat the scourge of war, poverty and to advance integral human development.

In a short time, we were able to find vaccines to limit the spread and effect of Covid. Similarly, I would like to suggest that we promote a vaccine against war, a vaccine which is well known but seldom used in international relations, a vaccine which has been available since the dawn of humanity, but seems always the first to be forgotten. This vaccine is a fundamental Christian value, that of brotherly love. It demands that we rediscover not only the human beings as single, individual persons, and as neighbours, but also as “a ‘people’, which naturally entails a positive view of community and cultural bonds.”²

Here too, business should rediscover their purpose not as just making a profit, but as a service, to persons and to communities, as an entrepreneurial endeavour to help them satisfy their basic needs and to have a better life. Business should be, first of all, at the service of human beings and not the slave of the tyranny of indiscriminate profit.

In other words, business needs to transition from services aimed at people in general, to services aimed also at individual persons, rediscovering the dimension of “neighbour”. It is the virtue of charity, which unites the dimensions of person and neighbour, building a true and lasting fraternity. This transition becomes concrete when the primary beneficiaries are the poor and disadvantaged. In this respect, there are three directions that the studies and practices of inclusive growth should take in order to fully address global challenges, like the eradication

¹ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, n. 166.

² *Ibid.* n. 163

of poverty. These directions are not original or new but it is always useful to recall them. Let me start with the first:

- 1) **Inclusive growth should start from the global common good.** Today a major part of economic study and practice is focused on private goods. These private goods are, by definition, exclusive since they are for personal use or enjoyment. However, inclusive growth cannot *only* be built around private goods or services, this would be a grave error. Inclusive growth can exist only if it starts from the common good and those goods that are “common”, and in particular, from the *global* common goods, such as the atmosphere, forests, oceans, land, natural resources, and others. These goods, by their own nature, are important for the life of every living being in our world. These goods are not excludable, that is, they can be denied to no one. Yet, since these goods have a limit, their consumption is limited. Many times these common goods are exploited for need or for greed. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church calls these common goods as “collective goods” and we can summarise the list to one word: environment.³ Care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good,⁴ destined for all, by preventing anyone from using these goods without impunity. It is a responsibility that must mature on the basis of the global dimension of the present ecological crisis and the consequent necessity to meet it on a worldwide level, since all beings are interdependent in the universal order established by the Creator. Responsibility for the environment, the common heritage of mankind, extends not only to present needs but also to those of the future. It has been said many times that our common home is not an inheritance from past generations, but on loan from future generations: this is a responsibility that present generations have towards those of the future, a responsibility that also concerns both individual States and the international community.
- 2) **Inclusive growth should deal with poverty, misery, and inequalities.** The notion of inclusive growth recalls economic ideas and practices to their original vocation, namely, the economic sphere should be a place of inclusion, cooperation and dignity. The current economic system excludes, rejects, and, marginalizes many people, frequently exploiting them in the workplace as well as natural resources. All of this in the name of an idol: profit. As Pope Francis clearly states, “some economic rules have proved effective for growth, but not for integral human development. Wealth has increased, but together with inequality, with the result that ‘new forms of poverty are emerging’”. The claim that the modern world has reduced poverty is made by measuring poverty with criteria from the past that do

³ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 466

⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 40

not correspond to present-day realities.”⁵ To change direction and aim at inclusive growth, focusing on poverty is important, but it is not enough. Instead, we must start by distinguishing between poverty and misery. There is a problem with the poverty lines. The problem is that the poor, especially the poorest and, those people living in misery, are ignored and the least poor, but not the poorest, are often the first to be helped. It is easier, in fact, to bring those who live close to the poverty line, those near the threshold, out of poverty than help those who live in real misery. The reason for this is simple: it brings more results. Therefore, we should always remember that addressing poverty and addressing misery are very close and equally important, but they are not synonymous. Secondly, it is critical to assess inequalities. We live in a world where formally everyone agrees that poverty should be eradicated, but there is much less consensus on the level of inequalities we can and should accept. Inclusive growth cannot eliminate inequalities entirely, but it must aim at reducing them as much as possible.

- 3) **Inclusive growth should be cooperatively defined.** We all know that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is not enough to define development. We know that inside GDP growth, for example, profits from the weapons and gambling industries, just to mention two, are included. Therefore, we are aware that inequalities, poverty, and misery are not fully captured by GDP. As Pope Francis says “Poverty must always be understood and gauged in the context of the actual opportunities available in each concrete historical period.”⁶ That is why, we should start imagining new sources to measure development. However, there is a step further we need to make. In line with Catholic Social Teaching, Pope Francis reminded us that we cannot simply work for the poor, we need to work with them, as protagonists of their own development. This means that we should include their perspectives, ideas, and points of view when we define inclusive growth and development. We need participative processes where the strategies to eradicate poverty and misery, to reduce inequality, and to care about our common home, are also elaborated on by the people primarily affected by them. This is a way to affirm the dignity of the people we are trying to include in economic processes. We need the humility to recognize that we do not possess all the recipes to solve economic, social, political and environmental problems. Cooperation and inclusion can start where there is equality between the parties, where both can provide their unique contribution. In other words, we need what St. Thomas Aquinas called the intellectual virtue of docility: to be ready to teach and, at the same time, to be ready to be taught.

⁵ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, n 21

⁶ Ibid.

As Pope Francis affirms in his Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, “It is imperative to have a proactive economic policy directed at promoting an economy that favours productive diversity and business creativity and makes it possible for jobs to be created and not cut. Financial speculation fundamentally aimed at quick profit continues to wreak havoc. Indeed, without internal forms of solidarity and mutual trust, the market cannot completely fulfil its proper economic function. And today this trust has ceased to exist. [...] The fragility of world systems in the face of the pandemic has demonstrated that not everything can be resolved by market freedom. It has also shown that, in addition to recovering a sound political life that is not subject to the dictates of finance, we must put human dignity back at the centre and on that pillar build the alternative social structures we need”.⁷

It might be worthwhile exploring these directions when we think about inclusive growth and poverty. The good news is that we are not alone. It gave me hope to see in Assisi, the more than one thousand young economists and entrepreneurs signing a pact with Pope Francis to give a new soul to the global economy. The voices of the young people of the so-called Economy of Francesco give a fresh, new energy to the efforts to realize an inclusive, sustainable, and human economy. We are all working for the same cause. It is time to join forces.

Finally, we must always keep in mind what St. Gregory the Great said: “When we provide the needy with their basic needs, we are giving them what belongs to them, not to us.”⁸

⁷ Ibid. n. 168

⁸ St. Gregory the Great, *Regula Pastoralis*, III, 21: PL 77, 87.