

DIOCESE OF SORA, AQUINO AND PONTECORVO

The Year 2000 Jubilee

**The Jubilee Year: cultural, economic
and socio-political exigencies and commitments**

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Truth is one, as reality is one. The good is one.

Verum et bonum convertuntur.

Yet truth and reality are inexhaustibly many-faceted, with an infinity of angles from which they may be studied and analyzed.

The exigencies and reflections put forward by the Church with the celebration of the Jubilee inevitably refer to the same realities and spring from the same sources as its social doctrine.

1. No man is an island, a self-contained individual, acting alone for self-fulfilment. Man is a “social animal” open to exchange with his fellow-beings: material and economic trade, cultural, ideal and spiritual interchange, first and foremost in the time and place where he lives and acts.

Otherwise, we should fail to grasp fundamental aspects of the reality that surrounds us: the family, the workplace, the city and civil society, the economy, the State, the international community.

Society is more than the sum of the individuals that compose it. Society gives rise to the economic, civic and spiritual common good, which in turn must benefit each of its members.

One recurrent view, that each man is moved exclusively by his own individual self-interest, is countered by its opposite, namely that it is the State and the community that are the ultimate measure of the good, the sole source of law, the absolute rule for many aspects of social life.

Extreme ideologies have often fueled one another by mutual opposition.

In the twentieth century we experienced the dramatic, tragic consequences of totalitarian concepts, of the right and of the left, that were set up as the ultimate measure of the good. But we must shun radical individualism, the idea that every man can think of himself alone and not concern himself with the context in which he lives. We must recover a correct and equitable concept of society that corresponds to the nature of man.

This argument is easy to comprehend for Christians, who know that they belong to a mystical body. But it must also be so, and always has been in history and in culture, for every man who is a member of a civil society.

2. The social doctrine of the Church that was inaugurated — or, better, resumed with attention to the new times — by Leo XIII in 1891 vigorously renewed and brought together these concepts in a historical period in which capitalism and economic life were based to a high degree on utilitarianism.

The economy is an intrinsic part of civil life. Without lapsing into Hegelianism or historical materialism, it is evident that the structure of the

economy and thought mutually influence each other. We must bear this interaction clearly in mind if we are to comprehend the reality of the world in which we live and be able to shape it.

The social doctrine was taken up again, with great loftiness of concept and of tone, at the Ecumenical Council, preceded by the powerful encyclical *Mater et Magistra*. At the Council itself, the doctrine was expressed chiefly in *Gaudium et Spes*, a document that looked to the future and was permeated with hope and Christian optimism.

Paul VI's encyclical on the development of peoples carried forward the ideals of the Council. It offered a thorough examination of international realities, the ever-increasing exchange of goods, ideas and cultures among all the world's peoples, the gap between the North and the South.

War and conflict often originate in glaring inequality and in injustice, but exchanges between peoples can also help to create friendly relations, especially if they contribute to economic growth and foster greater equality between and within nations.

Development is the new name of peace.

Development is not only economic; it also necessarily embraces the human and civil growth of men, in every corner of the world.

3. The enormous international economic progress achieved in the decades following the Second World War was closely bound up with the increase in trade. Between the 1950s and the 1990s, the material wealth that is produced in the world every year grew significantly.

However, economic development mainly benefited peoples that were already relatively rich. Inequality increased.

Some poor performances were worsened by the clash between the two major political blocs. *Populorum Progressio* argued for equity in the exchange of goods between the advanced world and backward countries and denounced the scandalous volume of resources being devoted to arms production.

The free market underlying capitalist systems is a powerful factor for economic growth, but under certain conditions it can also generate inequalities that have an adverse effect on social cohesion. Opportunities for development are more easily grasped by the groups that are best prepared to compete in the economy. They become increasingly prosperous while, in extreme cases, other social groups or entire populations are marginalized.

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis points out that economic development has neglected the aspect to which Paul VI's document devoted great attention, that of the growth of man and human dignity. This is expressed first and foremost through participation in the good consisting of culture and, by means of productive employment, in the creation of wealth. The importance of education is emphasized and attention is focused on the importance of the environment in sustainable development.

It is universally agreed that education is a key factor for social inclusion in the poorest nations and for economic development. Training must span technical and humanistic fields and focus on basic education in the most backward economies and on the highest level of knowledge in the advanced countries.

4. At the end of the 1980s, the conditions were ripe for the collapse of the communist regimes. With his far-sighted action and the authority of his very person, the Pope played a major role in this historic event; a fall that came about not through bloody war and revolution but as a result of internal exhaustion. That is, the growing awareness that the underlying rationale of those regimes had disappeared and of the insubstantiality of social cohesion founded solely in the economy and production. Maritain had already predicted the collapse as early as the 1930s.

Moral and spiritual values to underpin material pursuits were offered to these societies with the elevation in 1980 of the brothers Cyril and Methodius to the position of patron saints of Europe, together with Benedict; and with the celebration in Kiev of the millennium of the conversion of Russia to Christianity in 1990.

The fall of the regimes of real socialism was interpreted as the triumph of one economic and social system over another.

In the search for a middle way, for an optimum between capitalist and individualist regimes on the one hand and collectivist systems on the other,

political and economic practice has opted for the former, sometimes in extreme forms, with deleterious consequences for the economic and civil life of the societies involved.

Coming from generations of domination by a statist and materialist culture, these countries had neglected and nearly forgotten the canons of individual and social ethics. The unfettered pursuit of individual profit led to abuse, injustice and the juxtaposition of great wealth and widespread material and moral poverty. Without a shared body of social ethics, the frequent result was a flourishing of illegal and immoral activity, which may generate great individual benefits but destroy civil society.

The tragic fall of the ideologies that governed the lives of millions was followed by a form of laissez-faire capitalism.

With the disappearance of the old order, even with its injustice and suppression of individual liberties, some of these countries experienced a generalized impoverishment of their societies; the result was new wars and oppression. Inequalities were worse than those in Western countries, which in any case provide extensive systems of social security.

The rebuilding of civil society, a goal that these countries have struggled to achieve, must be based on rules and new ideals.

The market, an institution that man has created for man, in which each economic unit uses competition and other means to obtain the best possible outcome for its action, can and must be an instrument of progress for all. It must

operate in a context that is firmly grounded in ethical norms and appropriate laws. This is how the system was conceived by the founders of modern economic science.

Centesimus Annus emphasizes the importance of private property, its role in safeguarding the dignity of the person and the family. It shifts the focus to the availability of the fruits of man's work and economic enterprise. However, enterprise must take place in an orderly context, existing harmonically with the different forms of public good, cannot forget the canons of ethical relations or, more fundamentally, those of the moral good of the individual and society.

5. In the 1990s globalization emerged in full. It is related to the prodigious development of information technology and communications. It has been authoritatively called a "sign of the times". It is a new phenomenon with enormous potential, both positive and negative.

It is possible today to know at once what is happening in every other part of the world, to transfer not only information and knowledge but money and material goods as well. From the strictly economic point of view, great benefits can derive from this for the production and consumption of goods.

Globalization requires a cultural adjustment. It can overthrow existing equilibria and further increase inequalities both between and within economies; several salient features of the capitalist system are intensified. It is necessary to analyze the causes and consequences of the phenomenon, in order to

dominate and govern it. Some reactions, even violent ones, in defence of the existing order and the environment are understandable, albeit unjustified.

In the past few years globalization has mainly taken the form of movements of financial capital; if well managed, these generate new wealth, but they can also involve risks of instability. The phenomenon requires changes in economies' structures.

Globalization diminishes the sovereignty of individual states. Adjustments are called for in policies, particularly economic policies, and institutions. Advanced forms of international cooperation are necessary to regulate markets and prevent instability. International law must be established on new foundations.

Innovations must be introduced in entrepreneurial activity, in the supply of labour, in the behaviour of the social partners, in the preparation of young people. Investment in human capital becomes even more crucial, above all to seize the opportunities offered by information and knowledge technologies. The quality of education has to improve.

New attitudes will make it possible to reap great benefits from the new context. It is increasingly necessary to be able to compete in human capital. Inaction can only be harmful.

A globalization of men and women, consisting in the movement of persons from their homelands to countries with higher living standards, is taking shape, with even deeper cultural and economic consequences.

In the coming decades Europe will be affected by these developments and especially Italy, where the population is not growing but tending to decline, and where young people will become less and less numerous.

Immigrants can play an important role for the growth of the economy and society. The need for observance of the law is not in question. In a context in which the need for security and the regulation of flows is satisfied, immigrants can contribute greatly to a country like ours, but Italy in turn is called on to ensure civil conditions of reception, integration and respect for diversity.

These are the serious problems, and we shall increasingly have to contend with them in the coming years. The number of old people will grow exponentially. Policies of support for families, women and young people are needed.

In a democracy, political equality is undermined by economic imbalances and unemployment. With the centrality of man in mind, it is necessary to focus on realizing the right to work, which is a pillar of our Constitution, and on economic growth, which alone can give rise to a fairer society with greater solidarity.

Labour, liberation from necessity through hard work and the realization of each individual's personality must be a commitment of this new millennium.

In last autumn's annual meeting of the international financial organizations in Washington, an eminent politician of Anglican faith, referring to the world economic situation and the need to couple development policies with a

commitment to create more just societies and gradually eliminate the extreme cases of misery and marginalization, concluded his speech with the affirmation that by helping the weakest, we all become stronger.

The cancellation of the debt of the poorest economies falls in this context. The meeting of the Group of Seven countries in Tokyo in January called for resolute progress in the debt-reduction programme. The measures individual countries have adopted must now be implemented promptly. The bills now pending in Italy go in the right direction. The poor countries will be able to start anew, with the prospect of participating in the progress of the world economy.

6. Within our richer and more developed economies, we must look ahead, avoid the prospect of a society in decline, offering no promise for the future, in which the limitations of individualism and the blurring of the ultimate aims of human affairs would have free play.

It is from spiritual energy and values that moral strength also derives. The Church, with its eschatological vision and bimillennial experience, always pays attention to material needs as well.

By offering pardon, the Jubilee gives us hope, leads us, in our spiritual renewal, to act well in the present.

The passage through the gate giving on to the early decades of the new century must be marked by solidaristic ideals vis-à-vis those who are waiting to

participate fully in the life of society by gaining the possibility of a job. We must react to the insecurity associated with the difficult prospects facing the young and families.

Economic growth must proceed at a faster pace and be sustained.

The social doctrine of the Church contains answers to the problems and dramas of contemporary societies. They are viable for all men of good will. The Jubilee is a great opportunity to rethink the economy and the social order.

Faced with visions based on empiricism, analytical philosophy and relativism, we must all turn our gaze upwards in order to respond to the demand for meaning, to satisfy the desire to understand the purpose of existence. Faith and reason have a long road to travel together, before reason gives way to faith and is illuminated by it.

Catholicity requires openness on the part of all men and the different cultures of the world; at the same time it underpins the values and traditions of which our society is custodian.

The Jubilee has a message for the whole of humanity, for all men, for society and for each of us. It is up to us to respond with fitting behaviour, hard work and a new affirmation of life and hope.