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The SDGs from the viewpoint of the Encyclical Letter Laudato si’ and the volumes edited by Pontifical Council (Energy, Justice and Peace – Terra e Cibo).

To begin, I wish to thank the organizers, my fellow speakers, and all who are attending this important seminar. In particular I am honoured to mention professors Roberto Cauda, Director of the Centre for International Solidarity; Evandro Botto, Director of the Centre for the Social Doctrine of the Church; and Simona Beretta, member of the PCJP

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is still far from being achieved or implemented. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000-2015) have now run their course, having achieved moderate success. This fall, the UN will adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), fruit of a long process which benefited from

broad consultation and are being finalized in several rounds of negotiations in NY¹. The UN is establishing the development path for the next 15 years. This is happening precisely at a time when the world's people are facing complex and interrelated problems: the legacies and further growth of long-term problems never really resolved, such as arms traffic, slavery and addictions; the rise of new threats connected to biotechnologies, genetics, Internet and modern communication devices, as well as the competition for deep seas resources and the control of space; the emergence of particular phenomena which catch us unawares and inadequately prepared, such as the spread of Ebola. As Pope Francis explained in his Encyclical letter *Laudato si'*, everything is deeply interrelated. *Laudato si'* (LS) was released when today's Seminar was already under preparation, and this letter will also inspire and inform our discussion.

Concerning this complexity, this interrelatedness, what can the PCJP share? In fact, in the recent past, we have brought out two books that we will discuss here - *Energy, Justice and Peace* (English version 2014, Italian 2013) and *Terra e Cibo* (2015, which is currently in press in English with the title *Land and Food*). In these works, our Council has been **analyzing some important natural resources in the light of the Social teaching of the Church**: energy resources, land, the inputs used in food production and food itself, as well as the multiple issues which are more or less directly related to those resources. These include economics and financial issues including investment priorities and speculation; education and professional training; access to resources and their sustainable use (also with reference to mining); equity and fair sharing of benefits; justice in its different aspects; democracy and governance; and politics and inclusive management. We wish to propose an ethical framework for radical improvement in the management of those resources.

¹ Since 2013, several documents concerning the SDGs have been available on UNDP websites and <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org> ; this speech refers to the SDG's as described in the *Finalized text for adoption TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT* (1 August 2015).

Energy, Justice and Peace (EJP) and *Terra e Cibo* (TC) both start with a detailed **interdisciplinary assessment of the situation**.

EJP underlines the inequalities in the distribution and consumption of energy at the global, national and local (individuals) levels, as well as in the access to technology. Access to energy can constitute the difference between poverty and an acceptable standard of living for low-income families in developed countries; it can also be a matter of life and death for many people in developing countries. Severe imbalances in energy production, consumption, and resources extraction are also denounced (cf. EJP pp. 35-47).

TC is rooted in a field in which both the Church and the International community have had several decades of concern: food, agriculture and land management (this was not the case with energy, which was missing from the MDGs). The assessment of the situation, despite some progress in fighting hunger, is the following:

- the right to food is incomplete;
- agrarian reform has failed in numerous states;
- the internationalization and financialization of agricultural commodities and foodstuff markets lead to negative consequences in the price of food;
- unwise human activities in the environment are leading to an alarming deterioration of production conditions;
- in certain cases the use of arable lands is neo-colonial in character (cf. TC, nos. 11-48).

Both books focus on **the consistent culpability of Governments, because of their inadequate policies at the national level or their corrupt administration, and/or because of their weak support for effective multilateral governance**. «The management of energy, marked by conflicts and injustices, testifies to the inadequacy of existing international institutions (...). In fact, there is no supranational authority in charge of regulating the behaviour of transnational players» (EJP, pp. 73-74).

Similar concerns are raised in relation to agriculture and food security: several states have shown a reduced interest for agriculture and have bet on industrialization as a means to development; in more recent years, some countries focused on finance, contributing to a reduced investment in food production and research. This explains -- at least in part -- why some states which once produced enough food, became importers in recent years. Moreover, unilateral decisions (such as an embargo on cereals exports) could, in some situations, worsen the global food markets picture (cf. TC, no. 15). It must be recorded that the drastic rise in food prices (2006-2008) was not found to correspond to a significant parallel shortage in food production. This shows that food prices, and hence access to food, are not merely (and less and less) bound to an availability-demand equation at the global scale; rather, what is being witnessed is the financialization of agricultural prices.

Pope Francis says: «Politics (...) have been slow to react in a way commensurate with the urgency of the challenges facing our world» (LS, no. 165).

Both books emphasize the need for appropriate cultural and economic models.

That is to say, what happens is not the result of chance, of mere conjuncture, of bad luck. It is a man-made model, it is spreading, and its evolution was at certain extent predictable.

«The current dominant economic model can be described as a tension towards continuous growth, which must be accessed by more and more people, with the prospect of unlimited consumption. This model, based on and associated with the energy parameters of the more developed countries, is unsustainable. (...) “In the developed countries there is sometimes an excessive promotion of purely utilitarian values, with an appeal to the appetites and inclinations towards immediate gratification”², pointed out John Paul II. His successor, Benedict XVI, reaffirmed that absolutized consumerism is deceptively presented as the means to achieve happiness, as the good of the person. The accumulation of consumer goods is consequently

² *Centesimus annus*, no. 29.

encouraged by entities driven by greed for profit and promoted by mass media as a life model³. The unbridled search for new short life cycle products that devour energy and soon become obsolete appears to be never-ending. Moreover, these products are designed to encourage dependence and a sense of need. All this contributes to maximizing profits and maintaining an unsustainable energy paradigm, which allows some people to use plenty of energy, while others lack the minimum needed for a decent life⁴. It is ethically unacceptable to preserve the lifestyles of consumer societies for a small elite and extol them as the ideal for all» (EJP, pp. 76-78).

Terra e Cibo also urges us to acknowledge the responsibility of the prevailing cultural and economic model. As shown by several statements of Popes and of various structures of the Holy See, the Church has denounced a strategy of growth based on waste since the 1970s and repeated this at the UN Rio Conference of 1992. This “waste” model is strongly promoted by media and by aggressive marketing which sometimes became a vector of neocolonialism. When the idolatry of money is «aided and abetted by advertising»⁵, the vision of “food as nourishment” is supplanted by that of “food as a commodity”. Thus, the development of communities is blocked, the integral promotion of people is hindered by alienating them⁶, and too often «harmful or utterly useless goods» are touted with such irresponsible pressure that «communities that seek to rise from poverty to a reasonable standard of living are persuaded to seek this progress by satisfying wants that have been created artificially. The result of this is that they waste their resources and neglect their real needs and genuine development falls behind»⁷ (cf. TC, nos. 56-58, 132).

Let me suggest that **the analysis of this prevailing model is the part of our two books which has the strongest resonance with *Laudato si'***! Pope Francis explains

³ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the new Ambassadors accredited to the Holy See on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters of Credence*, 17 December 2009.

⁴ Cf. *Caritas in veritate*, no. 49.

⁵ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, *Ethics in advertising*, 22 February 1997, no. 10.

⁶ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, *Ethics in communications*, 4 June 2000, no. 13.

⁷ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS, Pastoral instruction *Communio et progressio*, 23 March 1971, nos. 60 and 61.

that no solution can be proposed to the crisis if we don't study its roots, which are clearly human (cf. LS, chap. 3). We are all grateful to Pope Francis for his depth analysis on the globalization of the technocratic paradigm. «Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand. Now, by contrast, we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us. Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational. This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit» (LS, no. 106). This «paradigm also tends to dominate economic and political life. The economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings. Finance overwhelms the real economy. The lessons of the global financial crisis have not been assimilated, and we are learning all too slowly the lessons of environmental deterioration. Some circles maintain that current economics and technology will solve all environmental problems (...). They are less concerned with certain economic theories which today scarcely anybody dares defend, than with their actual operation in the functioning of the economy. They may not affirm such theories with words, but nonetheless support them with their deeds by showing no interest in more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and the rights of future generations. Their behaviour shows that for them maximizing profits is enough. Yet by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion. At the same time, we have “a sort of “super-development” of a wasteful and consumerist kind which forms an unacceptable contrast with the ongoing

situations of dehumanizing deprivation”, while we are all too slow in developing economic institutions and social initiatives which can give the poor regular access to basic resources» (LS, no. 109).

In conclusion, we need a conversion of human hearts, challenging the dominant paradigm

«What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us? It is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity» (LS, no. 160).

Clearly, «the contemplation of this reality in itself has already shown the need for a change of direction and other courses of action» (LS, no. 163), and «require that we look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; otherwise we would be dealing merely with symptoms». (LS, no. 9). The Holy Father and the Pontifical Council have called for a new energy paradigm to master the development challenge and the sustainable management of creation. This also calls for a new paradigm to address interrelated challenges, rejecting non-consensual short-term solutions, rejecting opportunism, “green-washing”, “faith-washing”, and the pursuit of profit for profit’s sake. (cf. EJP, pp. 83 and 84).

From this fall, the new official, international path for development will be SDGs that are sanctioned at the highest level. Certainly, we know that the implementation of decisions is always hard to achieve, and even to measure. Nevertheless, SDGs will define, for the coming 15 years, what is development and what is not, what deserves funding and what not.

My question is: Can we use the SDGs process to promote a change of humanity and a change of the current deadly paradigm?

If yes, how and to what extent?, and what contribution can we make? In what circumstances or domains should we urge caution or special vigilance? Let each contribute «according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents» (LS, no. 14). In fact, the SDGs process still needs to specifically define the targets, and to appraise policy initiatives. The Church and the faithful can play a huge role in the debate over specification and implementation of the SDGs. Let us contribute both by concrete action and also by systematic reflection rooted in the permanent, evolving wisdom of Catholic Social Teaching.