



*The Role of Revealed Religions  
in the Achievement of Peace and Justice in the World*

Qom, Iran, 6 February 2016

***THE GLORY OF GOD IS PEACE AND JUSTICE ON EARTH***

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Excellencies, distinguished Authorities, Professors and students, dear friends

*Introduction:*

In the name of Pope Francis, it is my honour to greet you, also on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

As I stand before you for this important Conference on *the Role of Revealed Religions in the Achievement of Justice and Peace in the Word*,<sup>1</sup> I cannot help but recall the recent, most historic visit of President Hassan Rouhani to the Vatican. His meeting with Pope Francis generated new hopes in the hearts of very many around the world. Since the majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers, this should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of building networks of respect and fraternity, defending the poor and protecting nature.<sup>2</sup>

Today, we gather in the holy city of Qom, a spiritual place for Shiite Moslems that goes far back in history. Qom's sublime architecture and sculptures splendidly

convey that beauty which reflects the divine order of creation to which we, as one human family and servants of God, must and should turn in order to establish *peace* and *justice* among us. To do so would be to repeat precisely what Pope John XXIII once did.

At the height of the Cold War in the 1960s, Saint John XXIII invited the whole world to reflect with him on the experience of peace on earth in the life of the human family. His Encyclical Letter *Pacem in terris* (1963) was addressed in an unusual manner: not only to Patriarchs, Bishops, Priests and the Faithful of the Catholic Church, but also to *all people of good will*. The whole world teetered on the brink of nuclear war and groped aimlessly for a solution. Under these dismal conditions, but intending

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Damian Howard S.J. (London) and Mr. Robert Czerny (Ottawa) for their contributions to this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Laudato Si'*, on *Care for our Common Home*, § 201.

to be hopeful, Pope John wrote: “*Peace on earth -- which man throughout the ages has longed for and sought after -- can never be established, never guaranteed, except by the diligent observance of the divinely established order.*”<sup>3</sup>

In this statement, we hear an echo of the hymn of praise of God with which the Angels greeted the birth of Jesus: “*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those who enjoy His favour*” (Lk 2:14). In both instances, peace on earth is related to God's established order and his favour!

Far back in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, in fact very early in the relationship between God and Abraham, God revealed to Abraham the scope of his call. God's call consists in teaching justice and righteousness: “*No, for I have chosen him that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice...*” (Gen 18:19). It takes a prophet, made privy to God's plans (Gen 18:17), to teach righteousness and justice on earth; today this conference invites us to explore the reasons for this under the theme: *The Role of Revealed Religions in the Achievement of Peace and Justice in the World.*

I shall now endeavour to briefly discuss the foundations of revealed religion that continues to be crucial to the well-being of the entire human family; and also what it takes for revealed religion to contribute to peace and justice in the world.

#### *Creation: the Setting of Man's Vocation to Peace and Justice:*

My dear friends, the three great monotheistic religions, namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all share a high regard for the forefather Abraham and for their sacred scriptures. They all also believe in a God who freely manifests Himself, communicating to us His love, His will, His meaning, even Himself. This divine self-manifestation is for us revelation; and we first encounter it in the book of nature (*creation*), but most especially, at least in the biblical religions, in the relationship God establishes with man (*covenants*).<sup>4</sup>

Thus the *revelation* within the revealed religions is the source of a *theology* or *mysticism*, dealing with who God is and with man's knowledge of God. It has a corollary: an *anthropology* (and an *ecology*) about the human person and his world, what they are, where they come from, how human conduct must be (the domain of *ethics*) and their purpose or *vocation* and *destiny*. The latter give sense to human history by defining *social ethics* and *ecological responsibility* for the human family.

In all of these revealed religions, the beginning point of God's self-manifestation outside Himself is in the act of *creation*. Thus, in the Koran, Muslims are reminded of the supremacy of God as creator of all

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<sup>3</sup> John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, § 1.

<sup>4</sup> Thus, for example in the words of Pope John XXIII, the “*divinely established order*” is what it is because of the coherence with which God endowed it in the very act of his self-manifestation at creation. In short, at the origin of everything and of man, is God's gratuitous self-manifestation to us. This may take the form of an individual and his descendants who are called into a relationship with God, the history or record of which reveals who God is, who man is and “*God purposes for man*”. This is the case of the Biblical religions, which begins with Abraham, a prophet (Gen 20:7), and his descendants in the TaNaK (Old Testament), and continues in the New Testament with the disciples of Jesus, *Son of David*. In Islam, the belief is that God (Allah) made the content of the Koran known to the Prophet Mohammed, who recited it to his listeners.

things, and that He created a world of order and truth. The universe was established with *mīzān*, measure, and that everything has its proper place. Humankind was created as *khalifah* of the earth, to be its stewards; yet through the *fāsād*, corruption, that humans have done to the planet, we have upset the natural order. In a word, climate degradation caused by man is a sin against ar-Rabb, the Lord and Sustainer of all things.<sup>5</sup>

In the Bible, creation is presented both as a system of separations maintained and kept in order and in orderliness (*goodness*) by the powerful Word of God, and it is a *garden* prepared by God to be the home of humankind. Here too, the irruption of *sin* disfigures God's work and plan for humanity, thus setting the scene for God's subsequent intervention and engagement with humanity and his world in the *history of salvation*. The call of Abraham is set in this subsequent phase of divine engagement with humanity and the world in order to save them.

This is the material that makes up what Christians call the “Old Testament”; and it is also the source of knowledge of that *divinely established order* which brings and guarantees peace, as Pope St. John XXIII has observed.

#### *Principles for Shared Life in our Common Home*

The divine act of creation, especially in its presentation in an "*account of the beginning*" (*récit du commencement*), is the origin of what Pope St. John XXIII referred to as the *divinely established order*; and it gives rise to concepts and principles for Christians which are pertinent to our discussion of how revealed religions can help build *peace* and *justice* in the world.

#### *Human dignity:*

To begin with, the accounts about the creation of man show that, created in the image and likeness of God, each person, each human being has a *dignitas* - each one is a unique gift to the others. This *dignity* does not, therefore, derive from the State or any other human institution or any changeable majority opinion. It is rather to be respected and safeguarded by the State.

Knowing that they are created and loved by God, people come to understand their own transcendent dignity; they learn not to be satisfied with only themselves, but to encounter their neighbour in a network of relationships that are ever authentically human.<sup>6</sup> Men and women who are made “new” by the love of God are able to change the rules and the quality of relationships, even transforming social structures. They are people capable of bringing peace where there is conflict, of building and nurturing fraternal relationships where there is hatred, of seeking justice where the exploitation of man by man

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<sup>5</sup>Matthew Livingstone S.J., "Religioni e impegno per il clima: Tra l'Enciclica «Laudato si'» e la Conferenza di Parigi" *Civiltà Cattolica* n° 3973 (9.1.2016) <http://www.laciviltacattolica.it/it/quaderni/articolo/3730/religioni-e-impegno-per-il-clima-tra-lenciclica-%C2%ABlaudato-si?%C2%BB-e-la-conferenza-di-parigi/>

<sup>6</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 4.

prevails. Only love is capable of radically transforming the relationships that men maintain among themselves.<sup>7</sup>

In their transcendent dignity, men recognize that they are subjects of a *humanism* that is up to the standards of God's plan of love in history, an integral and solidary humanism capable of creating a new social, economic and political order, founded on the dignity and freedom of every human person, to be brought about in peace, justice and solidarity. And this *humanism* can become a reality if individual men and women and their communities are able to cultivate moral and social virtues in themselves and spread them in society.<sup>8</sup> But, not only are they, in their *dignity*, created social, and interdependent with others in human communities; the dignity of human beings requires that they be free from coercion in those matters which most closely concern their conscience, especially the matter of religion.

So, how we treat one another, the earth and its vulnerable creatures is a reflection of what we truly believe. When the root causes of violence, war and inequality are examined, what emerges is a grave alienation from ourselves, from others, from creation and ultimately from God, the source of all life. If the other is not recognized as equal in dignity and worthy of respect, then something else moves in to fill the vacuum; and this something is the ego, preoccupation with self, with one's own interests and plans, in isolation from others. Such are the attitudes which stymie peace.

*Justice as a relationship term:*

In the beginning, God's act of creation establishes a *communion* with man and his world, based on the threefold relationship between God and man, among human beings (man and his fellow man), and between man and his world. The maintenance of these relationships is also the maintenance of *communion* with God and harmony within creation. The disruption of these relationships through a disregard of or infringement upon God's command, as in the biblical story of the Fall, leads to a rupture in the life of *communion* between God and his creation and disharmony within creation.

When, then, in the Christian Bible, the story of salvation and redemption is the restoration of the life of *communion* between God and his creation through a repair of broken relationships; and when this repair is referred to in the Christian Bible as *reconciliation* and *justification* (making *just* again), then the Christian Bible invites us to understand *justice* in the context of relationships. Indeed, *justice* is a relationship term; and it denotes *respect for the demands of the relationship in which we stand*. When we respect the demands of the relationship(s) in which we stand, then the Bible calls us *just* (tsadiq and *justice* is צדקה). Thus, the pious man, whose worship of God expresses his respect for his ties with God, is *just*. Similarly, the man who maintains good relationship with his neighbours, respecting their rights, is *just*. Thus also with creation and the environment.

The opposite conduct, when we disregard the demands of the relationship in which we stand, is wickedness (רשע). Therefore, the biblical sense of *justice*, before it becomes *distributive*, *commutative*,

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<sup>7</sup> Idem.

<sup>8</sup> *Compendium*, § 19.

*restorative* etc., is primarily "relational": *respect for the demands of the relationships in which we stand*. This makes for harmony and *peace*.

The whole of life is about relationships or the lack of them. When we live and respect the demands of the relationships in which we stand, we are *just, and we act with justice*; and the fruit of justice is peace. Peace is directly related to the quality of personal and community relationships. To build a more peaceful world, work needs to be done at the personal level; between individuals, communities and nations; with creation, and ultimately with God. Everyone contributes to a more just and less violent society to the extent that we cultivate right and just relations at every level of our lives.

*Unity of the Human Family, Humanity as a Brotherhood, a Fraternity:*

The Bible not only posits a common origin of the human family in Adam and Eve in the creation story; it also calls God the Father and origin of all: "*Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another...*" (Malachi 2:10).

In relation to this affirmation of the unity of the human family, the story of the birth of Cain and Abel, as brothers, introduces diversity. As brothers (*a-delphos*) from the same womb, Cain and Abel are equal in dignity, as persons; but they are different in character and occupation.

Male and female God created us, brother and sister he called us to be. Fraternity – treating each other as the brothers and sisters that we are – is our true vocation. We are free to embrace it or reject it. God our Creator has freely made human beings equal in dignity, but not the same. Each one of us is fully loved, not more or less but infinitely, fully, uniquely, and unconditionally. Respect for the dignity of the other is the first sign of acceptance as a *brother or sister*.

Since, beside *brotherhood*, the Bible offers no other way for the multiplication and growth of the human family, *brotherhood* becomes the only form of existence of the human family in its diversity. Men and women are different, but they are brothers and sisters.

Any form of aggression and killing of man is a *fratricide*. We must watch over each other as *goël* (kinsman, redeemer, avenger), and seek each other's wellbeing in *solidarity*: in that *moral and social attitude, by which one, with firmness and perseverance commits oneself to the common good; i.e. to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all*".<sup>9</sup> In the process, however, we need to ensure that all, including the poorest, can participate directly in fashioning their common good. This is the important principle of *subsidiarity*: and it ensures the participation of all in the common business of life. A politics of participation rather than mere membership is the hallmark of subsidiarity.

This attitude challenges all social barriers that emerge in human societies and serve to isolate and threaten material wellbeing and social participation. In the light of what the human family is, as *one* and as *brothers*, solidarity, subsidiarity and participation must become everyone's true social habits.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, § 38.

### *Common Good:*

The discussion of fraternity leads seamlessly to another great teaching of the biblical account of creation: the *common good*.<sup>10</sup> This refers to "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily;"<sup>11</sup> and it is said to be "common", because only together as a community, and not simply as isolated individuals, is it possible to enjoy, achieve, and spread this good. Sometimes, though, the common good is misunderstood to mean simply the common desires or interests of the multitude. Nothing could be farther from the truth. *Common good* is not simply what people happen to want, but what would be authentically good for people, the social conditions that enable human flourishing. However, the *common good*, as important as it is, is not the greatest good. The ultimate fulfilment of every human person, created by God, can be found only in God, but the *common good* helps groups and individuals to reach this ultimate good. So, if social conditions are such that people are inhibited or deterred from being able to love God and neighbour, then the *common good* has not been realized.

### *Universal Destination of the Goods of the Earth:*

A crucial implication follows from the above, but most importantly, from the fact that God, in the biblical account of creation, bestowed the riches of the earth on man and woman, "created in the image and likeness of God". What follows is that God has "destined the earth and all it contains for all human beings and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice and charity".<sup>12</sup> Because the goods of the earth are so destined for the use of all, one may actually describe a *universal right to the goods of the earth*. Such a right, however, does not negate the *right to private ownership*. It only invites private ownership to recognize its social function;<sup>13</sup> for, "the principle of the universal destination of goods is an invitation to develop an economic vision inspired by moral values that permit people not to lose sight of the origin or purpose of these goods, so as to bring about a world of fairness and solidarity..."<sup>14</sup> In sum, "the universal destination of goods requires a common effort to obtain for every person and for all peoples the conditions necessary for integral development, so that everyone can contribute to making a more humane world, 'in which the progress of some will no longer be an obstacle to the development of others, nor a pretext for their enslavement.'"<sup>15</sup>

### *Summing up:*

St. Francis of Assisi once prayed: "Lord, make me a channel of your peace." We today pray in this sacred place of Shiite Islam: "Lord, make us builders of the city of man which deserves the name

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<sup>10</sup> In *Evangelii Gaudium*, in a section titled "The common good and peace in society" (§§ 217-237), Pope Francis asks us to place a vision of the common good back at the centre of our human projects.

<sup>11</sup> John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, § 55

<sup>12</sup> *Compendium*, § 171.

<sup>13</sup> *Compendium*, § 178.

<sup>14</sup> *Compendium*, § 174.

<sup>15</sup> *Compendium*, § 175.

*Salaam/shalom/pax*". In the above, I have described five *building blocks of peace and justice: human dignity, justice, unity and brotherhood of the human family, common good and the universal destination of the goods of the earth*. These five principles, which promote righteous and peaceful conduct in the world, are distilled from what the revealed Word of God in the Bible teaches about God, the creator of the world.

#### *The New Testament Principles of Grace and Love:*

But when God created the world, it was *good*. Indeed, it was *very good!* So, the five *building blocks of peace* described above were set in this original goodness of God's creation and were natural and native to human conduct: natural and native to human conduct because man was in perfect communion with God. With the irruption of sin, the alienation of man from God, the disfiguring of creation and the wounding of the nature of man, these principles remain; but no longer are they natural and native to man. Sin has put them beyond the natural and ordinary reach of man, rendering them difficult to be achieved by man. And this is where revelation in the Biblical religion continues the divine act of creation with a *divine act of redemption*: God's self-manifestation again in the history of man to save him from sin and its wounds.

In Christian belief, this *divine act of redemption* began already in the Old Testament with the promise of a Messiah; and it was fulfilled in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus Christ. This period of revelation in the Bible expresses God's gratuitous and prodigal saving action towards undeserving humanity out of His mercy. This mercy of God, which makes Him come to the help of humanity to save it from sin, is often described as *God's love in action*; and it is, I must admit, the most difficult part of Christian Biblical revelation for non-Christians.

Just two examples may illustrate the point. The Gospel of John says: "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16); while St. Paul teaches: "But God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

So, this part of Christian revelation teaches that man is not just a sinner; he is a sinner called by God's undeserved favour to experience God's mercy and salvation. This undeserved favour of God in the life of man is what Christian revelation calls *grace*; and it is what draws man again into a relationship with God. It is what *justifies* man, makes man *just* again before God. And so, we come to make the same point as above: *Justice* is a relationship term. It expresses, first and foremost, the relationship of communion and harmony, and all that we do to make this happen.

The teaching of the New Testament revelation, then, is that we fashion and maintain relationships of communion, friendship and harmony with people – not because they always deserve it, but because we love them and want to show them the same favour (*grace*) God has shown us by forgiving our sins and drawing us back to Himself.

Thus in showcasing, as it were the love of God, the New Testament is predominantly the revelation of the mystery of the love of God for sinful humanity, as a sign of the presence of the *Kingdom of God*; and it formulates *grace* and *love* (actions out of love) as the *new ethic of the Kingdom*, and the *new principle of human conduct* that ensures *peace* and *justice* in the world.

And so, if we were to ask the question again: “*What role does revealed religion play in the achievement of peace and justice in the world?*”, we would say that Christian revelation teaches us to shape the earthly city (world) in unity, peace and justice by rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the Kingdom of God,<sup>16</sup> through living, by God’s grace, the five principles above, now perfected by the new ethic of love. This word, *love*, is Christianity’s ultimate tool for *justice* and *peace* in the world.

In sum, as Pope Benedict XVI once put it: “The earthly city (of *peace* and *justice*) is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness (*grace* and *love*), mercy and communion.”<sup>17</sup>

#### *Our global common home:*

As a final note, let me observe that a clear case of the application of the tenets of revealed religion for *peace* and *justice* in the world today is how we *care for our global common home*. Care for the earth, our global common home, is, indeed, a necessary consequence of our common brotherhood; for our fraternity is now more than ever a global question, because we inhabit a common home, which is the whole world.

Not only did Pope Francis publish his Encyclical Letter, *Laudato si'*, on the care of our common home, last June. During the summer, several Islamic institutions and individuals came together (August 2015) to issue an important new document about the urgent challenges posed by climate change. The Islamic Declaration on Climate Change<sup>18</sup> is something Catholics everywhere can welcome and support. Islam’s geographical spread is vast. It includes major oil-producing countries. It also includes some of those countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, notably low-lying Bangladesh and Indonesia. There is no doubt that the addition of a strong Muslim voice to the chorus of those demanding a coherent moral response to the world’s ecological problems would be a huge strategic asset.

As we have observed already, to build a more peaceful world, work needs to be done at the personal level, between individuals communities and nations, with creation and ultimately with God. Everyone contributes to a more just and less violent society to the extent that we cultivate right and just relations at every level of our lives, including the earth and our environment.

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<sup>16</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 2009, § 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, § 6.

<sup>18</sup> See the text online at <http://islamicclimatedeclaration.org/islamic-declaration-on-global-climate-change/>



Already in 1990 and 2010, Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI applied the tenets of Christian faith to the ecological issue of care for the environment; and in our own day, Pope Francis has formulated it in an Encyclical Letter.

Both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI eloquently taught that, rather than simply being technological, the environmental crisis is fundamentally ethical as well.<sup>19</sup> In the past mankind was able to overcome perplexing problems through technological innovation; and facile confidence trusts that it will once again come to our rescue – thus, business continues ‘as usual’. But now technology is proving insufficient to compensate for the excesses of the developed world, with their negative impact on the earth’s ecosystems of the earth. Nor can technology address the injustices that are perpetrated as a result of environmental problems. So questions are beginning to be raised from an ethical perspective: Does the ability to do something actually justify doing it? What is technically possible may not be ethically justifiable. Instead, a responsible ethics of the use of the earth’s goods will in turn help to forge solutions that are more mutual and solidary between peoples, more respectful of the environment, and therefore more sustainable.

That is why, while climate change has received its desperately needed attention over the past year, the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis is equally emphatic about the social element of the environmental crisis. Yes, the rising water levels are a huge threat, but so are the persistent levels of poverty. We are not caring for our common home when some of our brothers starve unseen in a forgotten room and our sisters scavenge outside for food scraps in garbage heaps.

If we are to take *justice* and *peace* seriously, we must turn our attention to the workings of everyday economic activity, from those who bake or harvest before dawn and walk to the town market to sell their produce, to the analysts and investors in world financial institutions manipulating huge sums in an instant at their computers. Pope Francis has been emphatic that all this activity must serve the interests of all peoples:

“Economy, as the very word indicates, should be the art of achieving a fitting management of our common home. If we really want to achieve a healthy world economy, what is needed at this juncture of history is a more efficient way of interacting which, with due regard for the sovereignty of each nation, ensures the economic well-being of all countries, not just of a few.”<sup>20</sup>

This teaching derives from what the Church calls ‘the universal destination of goods’. All created things are to be shared fairly under the guidance of justice and love: that is, without excluding or favouring anyone. As Saint John Chrysostom taught: “Not to share one’s wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but

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<sup>19</sup> See [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html), message of John Paul II for World Day of Peace, 1990, and [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20091208\\_xliiii-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliiii-world-day-peace_en.html), message of Benedict XVI for World Day of Peace, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, § 206.

theirs.”<sup>21</sup> Thus economic efficiency and the promotion of human development in solidarity are not two separate goals, but one. Careful use of technologies, planning of labour, distribution of capital and debt, approaches to investment, responsible handling of human migration, and respect for national sovereignties must all serve, and not frustrate the origin and purpose of goods in their global context.

### *Conclusion*

Both of our religious traditions, Islam and Christianity, have long histories, with immense contributions to the intellectual and spiritual riches of humankind. It may be time to see how they, in their own ways, help make our earthly cities prefigurations of the Kingdom of God. “The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity... The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that “realities are greater than ideas”<sup>22</sup>.

As Pope John XXIII implored in 1963, so may we today gather together, with the richness of our differences and of our common moral and spiritual principles, to flourish in a *common home* within “*the divinely established order*”.

May God the Almighty and All-Merciful, who daily inspires generous desires to serve the common good and achieve justice and peace on earth, grant us abundant grace to live our commitments fully and bring them to fruition.

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<sup>21</sup> *De Lazaro Concio*, II, 6: PG 48, 992D, quoted in *Evangelii Gaudium*, § 57.

<sup>22</sup> *Laudato si*, § 201