



## ***“Blocks for Building a More Just Society”***

### **“Ecumenismo come fondamento della Pace”**

*Pontificia Universitas Antonianum, Rome, 18 January 2011*

Your Excellencies, Reverend Father Rector

Reverend Fathers, dear Brothers and Sisters in Consecrated Life

Dear Professors, Students and Friends

I bring you greetings from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and prayerful best wishes for a successful conference exploring Ecumenism as a foundation for peace.

In this session, Fr Francisco<sup>1</sup> and I have been asked to identify some essential elements, or so-called “building blocks”, needed to create greater justice and peace in our world? How are Christians to contribute most appropriately to the building-up of more just and more peaceful societies?

The most complete and authoritative answer available today may be found in *Caritas in veritate*, which gathers many resources of our Catholic social tradition and brings them to bear upon the basic crucial social questions of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Encyclical rephrases – and properly situates – our concern about “building blocks” as follows: How are we “to shape the earthly city in unity and peace, rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided city of God”? (CiV 7). Please note: the architects, the builders, the inhabitants are ALL secular – we do NOT build Christian cities of man!

How then does man, as a citizen of the here-and-now as well as of the heavenly city, contribute to the building of an earthly city more reflective of the heavenly one? To this great question, *Caritas in Veritate* provides a summary answer: “The earthly city is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion” (CiV 6). It is a matter of healing broken relationships of violence and violation and of promoting healthy constructive ones.

In one brief paragraph, about 130 words, the Holy Father details the qualities and virtues needed for our building. Let me read the passage slowly:

The complexity and gravity of the present economic situation rightly cause us concern, but we must adopt a realistic attitude as we take up with confidence and hope the new responsibilities to which we are called by the prospect of a world in need of profound

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Gearóid Francisco Ó Conaire OFM, coordinator of the USG/UISG JPIC.

cultural renewal, a world that needs to rediscover fundamental values on which to build a better future. The current crisis obliges us to re-plan our journey, to set ourselves new rules and to discover new forms of commitment, to build on positive experiences and to reject negative ones. The crisis thus becomes *an opportunity for discernment, in which to shape a new vision for the future*. In this spirit, with confidence rather than resignation, it is appropriate to address the difficulties of the present time (§ 21)

No plans or recipes here, the Holy Father does not prescribe any blocks. Instead, he seems to lay out five ways which he recommends – indeed urges – for building-up the city of man with qualities closer to the City of God:

- 1 – Begin with a realistic attitude, approaching the difficulties of the present time with discernment
- 2 – Ground the work in fundamental values, a new vision for the future
- 3 – With confidence rather than resignation, take up the new responsibilities
- 4 – Be open to profound cultural renewal, with confidence and hope
- 5 – Commit to new rules, new forms of commitment, with coherence and consistency

These are five profound competences, five focuses on how to make us better builders – and builders of better blocks – and perhaps as the prayer of St Francis says, “Make me a channel of your peace,” these five areas will prepare us to be better reconcilers. Let us explore each one briefly.

1. The first step is surely to face *the difficulties of the present time*, not with ready-made answers or simplistic (/simplifying) ideologies, but with *a realistic attitude* and *with discernment*.

In order to confront the problems of our world we must first study them, we must learn to SEE them clearly and recognize injustice at every level. “Seeing” demands more than a glance based on presumptions of ideology or prejudice. Rather, using the available scientific tools, we must conduct a rigorous analysis of social conditions, their causes and interconnections, their effects, especially on the poor and marginalized, and the contemporary experiences of the People of God who struggle. Besides, an empirical analysis, we make use of biblical insight, the tradition of our Church’s social teaching, theological reflection to “judge” the situation described. And out of this effort – which sometimes entails solitary research but often is a collaborative task – emerges a way forward and proposals of what to do and how to “act”.

In 1967 Paul VI stressed in *Populorum Progressio* that the Church has the duty “of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in light of the Gospel.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum_en.html) .

Reading the signs of the times is not something that happens automatically, but needs to be learned and practiced. Such genuine signs are the result or product of the past with all its efforts and mistakes, providing the basis and challenges for what we must do now in order to build – hopefully according to “a vision for the future” (2). Here are some of the signs which Pope Benedict identifies and explores in *Caritas in Veritate*: the economic crisis (§§ 40-41), globalization (§ 42), population (§ 44), business and ethics (§§ 46-47), environment (§§ 48-51), education (61), international tourism (61), migration (62), poverty and unemployment (63-64), media (§ 73) and bioethics (§ 74).

Let us take just one example: Today some 925 million people are undernourished; poor nutrition plays a role in at least half of the 10.9 million child deaths each year; and 1 out of 3 people in developing countries are (supposedly) affected by vitamin and mineral deficiencies.<sup>3</sup> We must feed those who are hungry (especially since there is so much excess and surplus food). At the same time, injustices related to control of seeds and land as well as issues of distribution must be addressed at the structural level in order to overcome hunger. “The World Food Summit estimates that \$30 billion a year could eradicate world hunger. That’s what the world spends on the military in a single week.”<sup>4</sup>

Complex social and economic patterns – such as those underlying hunger and malnutrition – must be addressed systemically, structurally, both globally and locally. So our first step is reading the signs of the times with *a realistic attitude*, with suitable research and *with discernment*, in order to uncover the injustices at every level of society and to shape the needed remedies.

2. Our next step is to ground the work *in fundamental values, a new vision for the future*, which can only begin with oneself, and so this second competence can rightly be called conversion, *metanoia*.<sup>5</sup> To know and accept oneself is the beginning of wisdom. And this attitude must be accompanied by a willingness to change, to work on oneself.

The Holy Father explains clearly the spiritual roots of the new vision we require. “When he is far away from God, man is unsettled and ill at ease” (CiV § 76). “Reason, by itself, is capable of grasping the equality between men and of giving stability to their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity. This originates in a transcendent vocation from God the Father, who loved us first, teaching us through the Son what fraternal charity is” (CiV § 19).

The ‘outer ecology’ of the structures of our family, our community and our society – what we call justice and peace or their absence – reflects the ‘inner ecology’ of each individual, community and organization. Individuals who refuse to change will contribute to the establishment or maintenance of unjust and conflictive societies. Are we producers, carriers, distributors of inner toxic waste – “*practical materialism, combined with relativist and*

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/worldhungerfacts2002/?id=1915> .

<sup>4</sup> See <http://tenthousandthingsfromkyoto.blogspot.com/2010/12/global-day-of-action-on-military.html> .

<sup>5</sup> See [http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0219/\\_PA.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0219/_PA.HTM) . In #87-91 of *Redemptoris Missio* John Paul II speaks of the need to live the Beatitudes and to have the spirituality of missionaries in today’s world.

*nihilistic thought*". The Pope referred to the latter as "*sickness of the spirit*" and "*spiritual toxic refuse*" which the so-called first world was exporting and thereby contaminating the peoples of other continents with (it).

"Without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is" (§ 78). A culture of peace is developed by those who practice peace in their everyday lives. This begins with individual choices to live non-violently in the world and is strengthened when groups in society commit themselves to resolve conflict and differences using this methodology. Commitment to nonviolence is intrinsically connected to a conversion process. For some, it is motivated by a realization that violent solutions tend not to restore or facilitate long lasting peaceful integration in societies, but often lead to increases in other expressions of violence. Others become advocates of peaceful and nonviolent solutions when they come in contact with the human suffering caused by violence. Peacemakers tend to emerge from situations of suffering rather than from academic settings.

Those who promote peaceful transformation of the world in a convincing way have usually worked to transform violent and oppressive tendencies in themselves and have become advocates for those who are suffering the violent consequences of unjust structures. If we are not actively part of the solution, then we are surely part of the problem.

3. *With confidence rather than resignation, let us take up the new responsibilities* which go with a new vocation and mission. For a Christian the starting point and the goal of all building is Christ, Alpha and Omega. Our vision is entirely shaped by God's salvific plan for the world – as set out in Scriptures and definitively expressed in the life and mission of Christ, continued through time in the Church – and at its centre is the human person. This is the foundation of our life and work.

Vision or mission is the third competence necessary for building a more just and peaceful society; and it is clarity about our human calling. How do we understand the place of human beings in the world? What kind of world do we want to live in, and to leave for future generations? Do we see ourselves as autonomous and self-sufficient, or do we accept that we are creatures, dependent and inter-connected? (*The acquisition of this 3<sup>rd</sup> competence—clarity of vision—may well entail the grace of healing, as in Mk.8:22*)

The industrial and scientific revolution irreversibly changed western humanity's picture of the world and man's place in it. The earth is reduced to a collection of material objects, structured like a machine, and treated as such, rather than recognizing the intrinsic worth of every creature. In the name of *science*, the human sciences too have produced an *ideology*, according to which *man is only the product of culture and the author of himself, of his life and of his society* (Civ §34). Man feels self sufficient; and not only does he *replace God*, he does away with God completely. Consequently, man thinks that he owes nothing to anyone, except to himself; and he believes that he *only* has rights. He makes appeals to

alleged rights, arbitrary and non-essential in nature, accompanied by the demand that they be recognized and promoted by public structures, while, on the other hand, elementary and basic rights remain unacknowledged and are violated in much of society (Civ.§43).

So, how we treat 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. "The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practise this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields in the *polis*." (Civ § 7)

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*;<sup>6</sup> 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. Are we moving towards more just relations or in the opposite direction?

The environmental crisis serves as a case study. In their Messages for the World Day of Peace in 1990 and 2010, both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have eloquently taught that, rather than simply being technological, the environmental crisis is fundamentally ethical as well.<sup>7</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 just 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

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<sup>6</sup> In the Bible, the "wicked" (רע) is one who does not respect the demands of the relationships in which he stands .

<sup>7</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.

solutions that are more mutual and solidary between peoples, more respectful of the environment, and therefore more sustainable.

Our vision, therefore, is not simply technological nor merely humanistic. “The vocation to development on the part of individuals and peoples is not based simply on human choice, but is an intrinsic part of a plan that is prior to us and constitutes for all of us a duty to be freely accepted” (CiV § 52). If we are followers of Jesus, then we have a responsibility to collaborate in bringing about the kind of world he envisioned. When he stood up in the Synagogue at Nazareth, unrolled the scroll and read from the Prophet Isaiah, he announced his mission to “give sight to the blind, liberty to captives and to announce the good news to the poor” (Lk 4). The good news, according to Jesus, was that the Kingdom of God is very near at hand (Mk 1:15), but not the kingdom expected by the Jews, whereby a warrior-king would expel the Romans and reestablish the monarchy. Rather, Jesus proclaimed a true Messiah would bring justice, and defend the poor and the exploited (Ps 72: 1-4, 12-14; Is 42: 1-4, 49: 9-13). Jesus himself showed the way to foster the Kingdom in our midst: he not only preached it tirelessly, but performed actions that embodied its coming. The preferential recipients of his saving action were the poor and the marginalized. And Jesus understood the coming of the Kingdom as his Father’s initiative inviting human conversion and involvement.

4. For the fourth competence, the fourth “*how*”, the Holy Father would have us be open to *profound cultural renewal* and show *confidence and hope*. Yes, it is fashionable to be negative, nihilistic, pessimist – it not only leaves one off the hook, but also absent from history, both human and divine. Quite counter-culturally, therefore, we Christians firmly believe that a more just and peaceful world is possible, and all the more so if we share a Franciscan spirituality.

Let us consider the question of military spending. The group *Global Day of Action on Military Spending* noted that in 2009 “...the world spent \$1.53 trillion dollars on the military. That is an almost inconceivable number. To put this number in perspective, in light of military spending why should it be deemed impossible by so many to overcome the injustices of our world? It makes no sense for anyone to argue that, because these problems have been with us since time began, therefore they necessarily have to be with us into the future. Where is our passion for justice? Where is our faith in the power of nonviolence and our conviction that faith can move mountains? Do we depend fundamentally on our own power and means to improve the world, or do we recognize our dependence on God who can make us worthy instruments for bringing about His kingdom on earth? If we were to take just 10% of what is employed for arms and apply it to humanitarian needs, the international community could more realistically work to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Material resources are not lacking, but rather the conviction and political will to bring about such vital and life-giving change.

Let us take the concrete example of climate change. While there are quite different scientific theories about the exact nature and extent of human contribution to climate change, many fear that global temperatures will continue to rise, with disastrous consequences for all life forms on earth, and therefore urge less dependence on fossil fuels.<sup>8</sup> And yet short-term economic interests (which concrete options made by you and by me tie in with) continue to dictate political decisions.

If we resign ourselves to fatalism, this can have drastic consequences for our overall wellbeing and for the wellbeing of others. For, despite the naysayers, economic resources exist that could help wipe the tears from the eyes of those who suffer injustice, who lack the basics of a dignified life, and who are in danger from any deterioration in the climate. The poor do benefit from champions in solidarity who believe that injustice can be reduced, that harmonious relationships can be fostered, that our planetary ecology can be made sustainable, that a world of greater communion is possible.

As Christians, each of us needs to believe in Christ's promise of peace. A culture of peace is built up by individuals who believe that peace is possible and act accordingly. As the number of people who adhere to this belief grows, the greater is the likelihood that societal change for the better will actually take place.

5. Finally, gathering the wisdom of the previous four, the fifth competence would have us commit to *new rules, new forms of commitment*, with coherence and consistency. Appreciating God's plan and our place in it, "is what gives rise to the duty of believers to unite their efforts with those of all men and women of good will, with the followers of other religions and with non-believers, so that this world of ours may effectively correspond to the divine plan: living as a family under the Creator's watchful eye" (Civ §57)

In his 2011 Message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Benedict said that: "Today too, in an increasingly globalized world, Christians are called, not only through their responsible involvement in civic, economic and political life but also through the witness of their charity and faith, to offer a valuable contribution to the laborious and stimulating pursuit of justice, integral human development and the right ordering of human affairs."<sup>9</sup>

The fifth "competence" for building a society of greater peace and justice, therefore, is cooperation, collaboration, networking and solidarity – all that binds people together in the multiple efforts required. This means that groups, organizations, institutions and movements of different persuasions – whether Catholic, Christian, inter-religious or non-confessional – need to respect one another's identities and differences, and not see one another as threatening or competing with one another. We must cooperate, coordinate,

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<sup>8</sup> Climate Change 2007", the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report., go to:

[http://www.ipcc.ch/publications\\_and\\_data/publications\\_and\\_data\\_reports.shtml#1](http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_and_data_reports.shtml#1)

<sup>9</sup> See [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20101208\\_xliv-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20101208_xliv-world-day-peace_en.html), #7.

and make our efforts converge towards the very same goals: greater justice, greater security, greater transparency, greater peace.

In September 2000, 189 nations formally endorsed eight Millennium Development Goals. The eight MDGs are: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; to achieve universal primary education; to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education; to reduce child mortality; to improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development. These goals, to be achieved by 2015,<sup>10</sup> were evaluated at a U.N Summit in New York in September 2010. Some progress was noted, but the goals remain far-off targets.

As Head of the Delegation of the Holy See, I expressed appreciation for the Millennium Declaration and its recognition that “the international struggle against poverty could not be limited to the management of the great economic variables, such as finances and foreign debts, commerce and development aid.” Instead, “the Family of Nations needs to appreciate the more specifically “human” aspects of development, such as eradicating hunger, promoting education, providing health care and social services, ensuring equal opportunities for work, and advocating responsible stewardship of the environment.”<sup>11</sup>

So, “the Family of Nations has committed itself to fighting material poverty. This is a key and noble goal to pursue; but in this effort let us never forget that material poverty has partners – relational, emotional, and spiritual poverty. The human person must be at the centre of concern in our quest for development. If everyone’s political, religious and economic rights and freedoms are respected, we will shift the paradigm from merely trying to manage poverty, to creating wealth; from viewing the poor as a burden, to welcoming them as part of the solution.”

Underlying all cooperation, therefore, and indeed underlying the other four aspects of building that we have examined, there is the human person as the *centre of our concern*. This must be our focus, as Pope Benedict XVI teaches, if we are indeed to build a city of man worthy of ourselves and our descendants for generations to come.

## Conclusion

“Make me a channel of your peace,” prayed St. Francis, “Make us builders of the city of man which deserves the name *Shalom*”. In *Caritas in Veritate*, we have found five complementary competences for taking up this noble human calling: 1) Realism and discernment; 2) New vision and fundamental values; 3) Confidence and responsibility; 4) Cultural renewal and renewed hope; and 5) New commitment and new rules.

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<sup>10</sup> See *Breaking with Business as Usual: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, Caritas Internationalis, 2007, pp. 2-7.

<sup>11</sup> Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson, *Statement*, Summit of Heads of State and Government on the Millennium Development Goals, New York, 20 September 2010.



These are five profound competences, five focuses on how to make us better builders. Since we are gathered here in this Franciscan centre of learning, it is important to recall the approach of Saint Francis and the Franciscans for living such virtues of the Kingdom. Francis considered himself a brother not only to every man, woman and child, but to all creatures, who have a common Creator and Father in heaven and are therefore related. The Universe is God's home. All things are created by Him, and thus they are good, indeed they are family. Family members are responsible for one another, especially for the vulnerable.

Accordingly, we are invited to become the peace that we preach to the wider world, which is a more beautiful and more Franciscan way of urging us to make the five competences our own. "Man's earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal city of God, which is the goal of the history of the human family..." (CiV § 7). "As we contemplate the vast amount of work to be done, we are sustained by our faith that God is present alongside those who come together in his name to work for justice" and peace (CiV 78).

Let me conclude with an image from the Encyclical's conclusion: "Development - *building the city*, we would say today - needs Christians with their arms raised towards God in prayer, Christians moved by the knowledge that truth-filled love, *caritas in veritate*, from which authentic development proceeds, is not produced by us, but given to us. For this reason, even in the most difficult and complex times, besides recognizing what is happening, we must above all else turn to God's love." On this first day of the Week of Prayer for reconciliation and unity, we declare: "Christians long for the entire human family to call upon God as "Our Father!" In union with the only-begotten Son, may all people learn to pray to the Father and to ask him, in the words that Jesus himself taught us, for the grace to glorify him by living according to his will, to receive the daily bread that we need, to be understanding and generous towards our debtors, not to be tempted beyond our limits, and to be delivered from evil (cf. Mt 6:9-13)" (CiV 78) Amen!

**Peter K. A. Cardinal Turkson**

**President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace**