

Evangelii Gaudium

Chapter 4

The Social Dimension of Evangelization

Para:

176. The authentic and integral meaning of the mission of evangelisation might be distorted unless the social dimensions of evangelization are properly considered.

177-179: At the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others. To believe that Jesus shed his blood for us removes any doubt about the boundless love which ennobles each human being. Our redemption has a social dimension because "God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men". From the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, which must necessarily find expression and develop in every work of evangelization. The first proclamation, which invites us to receive God's love and to love him, in return, brings forth a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others. God's word teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the incarnation for each of us" As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt25:40)-the measure you give will be the measure you get" (Mt 7:2). "Going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters" is an absolute priority and "the service of charity is also a constituent element of the Church's mission and an indispensable expression of her very being".

180-181: The Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God. Nor is our loving response to God merely an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need, a kind of charity a la carte, or a series of acts aimed solely at easing our conscience. Christian preaching and life are meant to have an impact on society. Jesus commands his disciples to proclaim the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt10:7). The kingdom, present and growing in our midst engages every level of our being and is directed to "all men and the whole man". Our mandate is to "go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation". The creation refers to "every aspect of human life, all dimensions of existence, all individuals, all areas of community life and all peoples. Nothing human can be alien to it."

182-185: The Church cannot help but be concrete lest it allows the great social principles to remain generalities which challenge no one. We have to draw practical conclusions. Our pastors are

entitled to offer opinions on all that affects people's lives, (taking into account the contributions of the different sciences). The task of evangelization demands the integral promotion of each human being. Religion cannot be restricted to the sphere of private life. God wants his children to be happy in this world as well as the next, for he has created all things "for our enjoyment" (1 Tim 6:17), the enjoyment of everyone. Christian conversion demands addressing those areas and aspects of life "related to the social order and pursuit of the common good." Who would claim to lock up in a church and silence the message of Saint Francis or Blessed Teresa of Calcutta? They would not have tolerated it. Authentic faith has a deep desire to change the world. We love the magnificent planet on which God has put us and we love the human family which dwells here. If indeed "the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics" the Church cannot remain on the sidelines in the search for justice. The Pope commends the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church to us, for use and study. However, the Pope does not have a monopoly of wisdom in these areas-as Pope Paul VI said "It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country".

Pope Francis wants to consider further two critical issues-the inclusion of the poor in society and peace and social dialogue. 186-192: Christians are called to be instruments of God for the liberation and inclusion of the poor and to be attentive to their cry for help. The scriptures demonstrate how God wants us to hear the cry of the poor. A lack of solidarity towards the needs of the poor will directly affect our relationship with God." How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" (1Jn 3:17). This is not a question of a mission reserved only to a few. "The Churchhears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might". Jesus commanded his disciples "you yourselves give them something to eat." Solidarity means a new mind set which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all, over the acquisition of goods by the few. Solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them. Private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them-otherwise there would be no wealth to help the poor. This may require structural transformation but without new convictions and attitudes these will become corrupt, oppressive and ineffectual. Hearing the cry of the poor can involve whole peoples. The planet belongs to all mankind; if peoples live in places with fewer

resources or less development they are still entitled to their dignity. The more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so their goods can be placed more generously at the service of others. This does not mean just a dignified sustenance but also education, health care and employment.

193-196: “Water extinguishes blazing fire: so almsgiving atones for sin”. God’s word teaches us to be merciful. “Blessed are the merciful, because they shall obtain mercy”. (Mt 5:7). Scripture shows the Fathers of the Church created a counter cultural resistance to the self-centred hedonism of paganism-love and mercy hears the cry of the poor. This is a very simple message- which Jesus taught us by his words and actions. We are required to be orthodox but we must avoid passivity, indulgence or culpable complicity regarding intolerable situations of injustice and the political regimes which prolong them. St Paul was told by the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem that concern for the poor was a benchmark of authenticity and the Churches he founded must reject the self centred lifestyle of the pagans. We should note this, living as we are in the midst of self centred, self obsessed hedonistic pagans. We must not be tempted by the limitless possibilities for consumption and distraction offered by society and must avoid hardness of heart and mind.

197-201: The Divine preference for the poor is hard wired into Christian theology. As Benedict XVI taught it “is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty”. That is why Francis wants a Church which is poor and for the poor. The poor have much to teach us. We are called to find Christ in them but also to be their friends. This approach to the poor is completely different from attempts to exploit them for personal or political interests. It involves a real appreciation and love for the poor resulting in a true concern for their person. In every Christian community the poor must feel at home. We must ensure the poor do not lack spiritual care. None of us in the Christian community are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice. It cannot be claimed that an academic, business, professional or ecclesial career demands more attention –“spiritual conversionis required of everyone.”

202-208: Francis discusses the economy and the distribution of income. He deprecates the absolute autonomy of markets and speculation and the failure to tackle the structural causes of inequality, which he regards as the root of all social ills. The dignity of the human person and the pursuit of the common good ought to shape all economic policies. Ethics, global solidarity, the equitable

distribution of goods, the protection of labour, and the defence of the powerless are not paramount as they should be given God's demand for a commitment to justice. Business is a noble vocation providing those engaged in it serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and make them more accessible to all. Government activism is required for the better distribution of income, the creation of employment and the lifting up of the poor. The invisible hand of the market cannot be trusted. Francis doesn't like firms that want to increase profits (Note: normally they want to reduce losses!) by reducing the workforce and thereby adding to the ranks of the excluded. (Note: If you are making losses and you don't reduce costs-everyone loses their job!) Francis thinks politics is a lofty vocation and we need more politicians who have a strong moral sense and are dedicated to the common good. Francis notes the effect of globalisation and looks for a more effective co-operation between nations that ensures fairer outcomes for poor countries. He wants people freed from an individualistic, indifferent and self centred mentality. He doesn't want to offend anyone.

209-216: Francis discusses the plight of the vulnerable in our society. He speaks of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly and migrants. He also mentions the victims of human trafficking. He warns the complacent and those who have a comfortable and silent complicity in injustice that they have blood on their hands. (Note his message to the mafia recently "Repent or go to hell!".) He also refers to and deplores the violence directed at defenceless women. He states again the arguments for the sanctity of human life in defence of the unborn and makes abundantly clear that the Church's teaching will not change on this key issue. Finally, he makes a plea for all to respect the environment and all God's creatures. Christians are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, whose stewardship God gave to us, and all of its peoples.

217-237: The Pope speaks of peace in society-not a false peace where the institutions of society are designed to silence or appease the poor nor an absence of war based on a precarious balance of power. Peace should be fashioned by efforts directed day after day towards the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a perfect justice among men. Francis believes there are four principles that have to be followed.

- Time is greater than space. Put simply, we can't do everything at once-Rome wasn't built in a day. We need to proceed calmly and rationally and build processes that will take improvement into the future and will bring lasting

benefits to mankind rather than seek short term gains at the expense of the future.

- Unity prevails over conflict. Some ignore conflict; some are trapped by it in a spiral of antagonism and cannot escape. A third way is to face up to conflict and seek the deeper human unity that lays beneath the surface- the dignity of the human person. Christ has made all things one in himself. This deeper unity preserves what is valid and useful on both sides. The Lord made peace by the” blood of the cross”. (Col.1:20).
- Realities are more important than ideas. Realities are-ideas are worked out. We reject the means of masking reality: angelic forms of purity, dictatorships of relativism, empty rhetoric, objectives more ideal than real, brands of ahistorical fundamentalism, ethical systems bereft of kindness and intellectual discourse bereft of wisdom. (Note. The religion in the head directed inwards that Francis attacked before not the religion directed at our fellow human beings he commends. For brands of ahistorical (not historical) fundamentalism, think, e.g. Islamic Fundamentalism ditto ethical systems bereft of kindness). Ideas are capable of classifying and defining but are not a call to action. We are called to action by realities illuminated by reason.
- The whole is greater than the part. We must not get caught up in a globalised universe seduced by conventional wisdom; on the other hand we must not be parochial, trapped in a museum of local folklore, as it were. We need to pay attention to the global so we avoid narrowness and banality and to the local so we keep our feet on the ground. So the whole is greater than the parts but also, greater than the sum of its parts. For Christians this invokes the totality or integrity of the Gospel-which will always remain good news until it has been proclaimed to all people, until it has healed and strengthened every aspect of humanity, until it has brought all men and women together at table in God’s kingdom. The whole is greater than the part.

238-258: The Pope considers the various relationships the Church has with other sets of believers in our society with a view to making a contribution to peace.

- The State. Its responsibility is to safeguard and promote the common good. Based on the principles of subsidiarity, it is, in the view of the Vatican, where the buck stops. The Pope recommends profound social humility. (Note: Don’t we all.)

- Faith, Reason and Science. Faith is not fearful of reason but conformable to it-the light of faith and reason both come from God. The Church acknowledges the use of methods appropriate to the empirical sciences but supports the rights of other forms of human knowledge such as philosophy and theology (and he could have mentioned philology, psychology and so on). Faith itself elevates us to the mystery that transcends nature and human intelligence. Above all he is determined that so called scientific advances will remain respectful of the centrality and supreme value of the human person at every stage of life.
- Other Christians. Jesus prayed that “they may all be one”. The credibility of the Christian message would be much greater if Christians could overcome their divisions. This is particularly the case in Africa and Asia. We can also learn from our separated brethren, for example, about Episcopal collegiality and their experience of synods from the Orthodox.
- Judaism. With the Jews we worship the one true God and we share the Old Testament. We sincerely regret the persecutions of Jews in which Christians were involved. Whilst certain Christian beliefs are not accepted by Judaism, the Church will continue to proclaim Jesus as the Lord and Messiah. Studies of the Old Testament, however, demonstrate a rich complementarity which allows us both to mine the riches of God’s word.
- Other religions. The character of this dialogue must be determined by truth and love. A dialogue that seeks justice and peace is an ethical commitment for us Christians. True openness involves remaining steadfast in one’s deepest convictions. A facile syncretism (joining together mutually exclusive beliefs in a half baked compromise) is unacceptable.
- Islam. The followers of Islam have been characterised as people of the book. Many Moslems now live in the West, where they freely worship and become part of society. The Pope asks that Christians are treated with similar respect in Moslem countries. (Note. Which they are not-they are murdered, their Churches are wrecked by mobs and not allowed to practise their religion.) The Pope notes some of the positive aspects of their belief. (Note: unlike Western Christendom, Islam does not recognise any distinction

between Church and State and therefore has difficulty with a pluralist society.)

- Non-Christians. If they live by their own consciences they can live “justified by the Grace of God”.

255-258: Religious Freedom. This does not mean marginalising religious beliefs to a private matter which inhibits any public manifestation. The agnostic or non-believing minority should not be allowed to arbitrarily impose their views to the detriment of religious freedom. (Note: The campaign against faith schools.)

The Pope notes the media’s negative views on religion and acts of discrimination against Catholics. He notes as well, the contempt shown for religious publications,

Those who seek the truth can be our allies in the pursuit of truth and the dignity of the human person.

The social dimension of the Gospel message is inescapable.

Questions for break out groups.

The Pope is not happy with free enterprise. How should we create the wealth to look after the poor and support migrants?

Do you think inequality is the root cause of all our social ills? If so, what role does idleness, greed and anti-social attitudes play?

What is the relevance of a utilitarian view, that the object of our actions is the greatest good of the greatest number?

How do we persuade Muslims to treat Christians in their countries with the respect and decency with which we treat Muslims in ours?

The Pope stated that he did not want to upset anyone. Has he upset you by what he has said or what he hasn’t said?