



ADDRESS

of **His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin**

Secretary of State of His Holiness Pope Francis

and Head of the Holy See Delegation

to the Summit for Refugees and Migrants and to the General Debate of the
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“Dignified agents of their own destiny”:

Pope Francis’ Call for Escaping Poverty

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Foundation in the United States of America,

Distinguished Faculty Members,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very grateful to have been invited to address this distinguished audience at this “Dinner Event” during your course entitled “Dignified agents of their own destiny”. I have been asked to speak on “Pope Francis’ Call for Escaping Poverty”, and I shall attempt a brief overview of the crucial issue of poverty which is so dear to the Holy Father.

It is well known that the Holy Father’s efforts to denounce and combat poverty are one of the main priorities of his Pontificate. This is clear when,

at his election, he chose the name of the Saint of poverty, Francis of Assisi. His Holiness wants a Church which is poor and works for the poor, in continuity with the Social Magisterium of the Church. Indeed, a month before the opening of the Second Vatican Council in October 1962, Pope Saint John XIII spoke of the Church as a house for everyone but particularly for the poor.

The preferential option for the poor in the Social Doctrine of the Church

This “preference” of the Catholic Church for the poor is a directive of the Social Doctrine of the Church, known as the preferential option for the poor. It consists of a “special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness”. This option – as Pope Francis reminded us in his Lenten Message of 2014 – “is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty”. The Church, in imitating God who became poor for us, seeks to act in accordance with the preferential option for the poor. It is an option that respects the dignity of every human person.

Indeed, when poverty is identified with material destitution – the lack of basic rights and needs such as food, water, hygiene, work and the opportunity to develop and grow culturally – it offends the dignity of the human person created in the image of God. Christians are called to help people in need, and to do so with respect for their dignity. Poverty is a problem that humanity cannot ignore, since the conditions in which a great number of people live is an affront to their God-given dignity and a threat to the world community and to peace.

Secondly, the Church’s preference for the poor derives from the call to fraternity and communion. It is rooted in our common heritage, in our relationship to the Incarnate Word, and in our universal vocation to sonship in God. Thirdly, the Church acts in accordance with the preferential option for the poor by defending the right to life. As Pope Benedict said, “The extermination of millions of unborn children, in the name of the fight against poverty, actually constitutes the destruction of the poorest of all human beings” (*World Day of Peace Message, 2009, 3*).

Moreover, poverty principally affects children. Indeed, as stated in UNICEF's Annual Report for 2014, since the current world economic crisis there are 2.6 million children below the poverty line in the world's most affluent countries, which brings the total number of children in the developed world living in poverty to an estimated 76.5 million.

The right to development

In his Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1991) Pope Saint John Paul II underlined the need "to abandon a mentality in which the poor — as individuals and as peoples — are considered a burden, as irksome intruders trying to consume what others have produced" (no. 28). The poor, he said, seek the right to share in the goods of this world and to use their abilities for employment, thus creating a world that is more just and prosperous for all. Recognizing the dignity of the poor, their capacity and their right to advancement, is indeed of the utmost importance. According to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, "development is not only an aspiration but a right that, like every right, implies a duty" (no. 446). In fact, it implies two corresponding duties: the duty to accomplish one's own development at all levels, and the duty to help others in their own development. The need to cooperate, to work together in solidarity, is something we are all called to, and it consists in firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, for which we are all responsible (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* n. 38).

When it comes to putting this duty into practice, national governments have a fundamental role as they are responsible for establishing the necessary conditions for every citizen to fulfil themselves or, as Pindar expressed in one of his hymns, to "become what they are" (cfr. *Pitiche*, 2,72). This has a direct bearing on the common good that we all seek to promote and protect. Politics needs to regain a sense of vocation, a sense of love and responsibility in respecting the dignity of all persons. As Pope Francis emphasized in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: "Politics, though often denigrated, remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good" (no. 205). Indeed, policies should offer and guarantee adequate conditions in the

areas of education, health, water and sanitation, infrastructures, economics, culture, as well as in legislative, executive and judicial sectors. When governmental policies succeed in establishing these conditions, we can speak of a “performative environment” which stimulates, improves and orients the capacity of human creativity for the good of all.

Pope Francis, moreover, acknowledges and appreciates the crucial role of business leaders in creating employment opportunities, thus also providing opportunities for the poor. In his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* he emphasizes need to provide employment for all, and insists on the need to promote an economy which favors productive diversity and business creativity.

The poor as dignified agents of their own destiny

Pope Francis is particularly sensitive to the gift of creativity in the many poor people who suffer injustice. In October 2014, His Holiness invited representatives of grassroots movements around the world to meet in the Old Synod Hall of the Vatican. He did this in continuity with the preferential option for the poor. As he said just a year later in his Address to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, in Bolivia, “Love for the poor is at the centre of the Gospel”. It was in his encounter in Bolivia with the movements that Pope Francis praised the creativity of the poor and expressed his belief that the future of humanity is to a great extent in their hands. He encouraged them to continue believing in their abilities to implement creative alternatives in their efforts to provide labour, housing and land. He invited them to continue participating actively in the great processes of change on the national, regional and global levels, to benefit all peoples but especially those left behind by the world markets.

Recognizing the talents of the poor, His Holiness also observes their particular capacity for sowing seeds of transformation, as they seek to make legislation more fair, and to promote the renewal of politics and the economy. Indeed, when Pope Francis addressed the Second World Meeting of popular movements in Bolivia, he highlighted the role of the poor in peacefully combating the structural causes of poverty and

inequality, unemployment, the lack of land and housing, and the denial of social and labour rights. This process of transformation toward an economy which reclaims the centrality of human dignity is the certain way to overcome the mentality of profit at any price. It is a process which also prevails over the evils of social exclusion and the destruction of our common home. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis recalls that “time is greater than space”, simple words that reflect a deeply profound and meaningful principle: to work slowly but surely, calmly but diligently, free of the obsession with having quick results.

Pope Francis also notes the unique solidarity that exists among those who suffer, among the poor, among those whom our civilization seems to have forgotten. Solidarity, as the poor experience it, often means thinking and acting with respect to community. The poor thus teach us the true meaning of fraternity, solidarity and respect for the environment.

Conclusion

We can say, then, that the future of our human family lies in the capacity of human beings to be the artisans of their own communities. We have the duty to provide them with the tools to fulfil this vocation. It is a moral imperative which we cannot ignore, a profound duty to give to the poor what is theirs by right and to ensure that the goods of creation are available for all.

In their struggle against poverty, the poor must not be abandoned. Just as they have the duty to work to ensure their own growth and development, it falls to us, religious leaders, politicians, business people, academicians, the Church faithful, and wealthier citizens to help the poor in their advancement. In this sense, a conversion of our hearts is needed: “We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 198).

Thank you.