

“Building a better world, from the principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church”

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1. Introduction.

1. At the end of 2019, a virus called COVID-19 is heard for the first time alarmingly, without thinking that at the beginning of 2020 it would spread all over the world, so that it was necessary to declare the world in state of pandemic. We saw how it spread throughout the world, and the number of infected and dead multiplied day after day, and it's still spreading. The information in the media showed us the ravages of the pandemic in a quantitative way through graphs; our daily life has been disrupted in all senses, and now we are facing a big global crisis, mainly in health and economy, which has affected our entire lives.

2. It is clear that nowadays the pandemic represents a big challenge, which goes beyond health and economic aspects (and it is evident that the challenge is, and that it must be attended), and that it requires a practical response, with a clear and objective vision of reality. And the question of HOW TO RESPOND TO THIS CHALLENGE comes up?.

3. On August 5, 2020, the Holy Father Francisco, in General Audience, once again surprised us, and made us respond to the challenge of the pandemic, with the beginning of a cycle of “Catechesis”, to invite everyone to “reflect and work together, as followers of Jesus who heals, to build a better world, full of hope for future generations ”(cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, 183), lit by the Gospel, the theological virtues and the principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

4. Responding to the invitation of the Holy Father, I would like to share the following reflections. Firstly, I'd like to show you the need and importance of re-interpreting reality from the Christian point, that is, a human comprehension from faith. Secondly, to reflect briefly on the principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Finally, to talk about the main proposals of the Holy Father's catechesis to build a better world.

II. Re-interpret the reality of the pandemic.

5. It seemed that life was “normal” before the pandemic and we could understand that “normal life” in two ways:

6. The first one, a life without COVID 19 (without any of the complications or repercussions entailed by this pandemic that we are facing now).

7. The second one, an ordinary life forced to be “normal”, as if we had been used to live “normally” with poverty, with violence, with the war, with many other diseases, with migration, in a mean and secularized society, with a very poor faith, with corruption and impunity, with injustices, with a lack of health services, with a crisis in education, economy, politics, ecology, culture, family, faith, etc.

8. It seems that what we are living now has made us rethink and stop to see the "back" and "now" and above all "the future", and it demands us to rethink about our life, and truly ponder the "supposed normality" that we had been living, and to make an existential approach, and to go beyond a “ new normality”.

9. This "new normality" asks us to "renew ourselves". We may have heard the expression “to renew or to die”, which points out the healthy need to make substantial and radical changes, but I think that, in this sense, the words of Jesus would help us more: “New wine, new wineskins” (Mt 2,22) which clearly lights the way towards the “new normality”. I’d rather call it “deep and interior renewal”.

10. For this renewal, it is necessary to understand the pandemic. Certainly, as a health and economic challenge, but above all, as a personal challenge that leads us to an ethical challenge, since it is a valuable experience because it touches our consciousness and freedom. Many of our convictions have been tried. Moreover, it is not only a social fact, but an encounter with the other, where our freedom and responsibility towards such neighbor spots each of us in front of the other's face, who challenges us, because "it's you with the other". So it's hard to understand reality without the other. That is why the Holy Father warns us against "an even worse virus, the one of indifferent meanness."

11. In addition, the pandemic is not only an event that has healthy, economic or political repercussions, but an experience that challenges our morality, our freedom, and our way of being with people. Because it doesn't only affect a lifestyle that has been altered by new rituals of healing and prevention, but it is a reality that questions the way I understand myself and how I

understand my humanity. As far as I take seriously my own human condition and that of my neighbor, as far as I will respond to the challenge of the pandemic that challenges me.

12. Also for this renewal it is necessary to re-interpret the reality of the pandemic. There are many biased, false, and bad intended interpretations that lead us to a wrong response to the challenge. For example, postmodern visions go from rationalism to irrationalism, and their interpretation key is the emotion, the intuition, the affection, and the instant.

13. Another example is what happens in many conservative and even Catholic environments, whose prevalence is the weak thinking, which invades social networks and shows us apparently pious convictions to interpret the pandemic, but it is false and deviant, like the news disseminated in Catholic environments saying that the pandemic is a punishment from God, that the global apocalypse is approaching, that there are conspiracy theories that take advantage of the pandemic to plant microchips in the vaccines that will be created to stop the pandemic. It is believed that by watching some videos on YouTube about the pandemic, one already has factual and true knowledge about the new world order, but in fact, they are false and they just reflect that weak thinking.

14. How to re-interpret the reality of the pandemic? The key is not the (political) power nor the fight between good and evil, but the HOW TO BE A SUPERNATURAL BEING since it breaks into our history as mercy, whose commitment with those who are dismissed, the weakest ones, and the most marginalized is fundamental. That is, to re-interpret reality from the light of the Christian faith.

15. Christian revelation leads us to meet Christ, so one discovers that faith is a certainty that reaches mind and heart, and that it can be a method of knowledge, since faith helps us and allows us to detect deep insights about reality that human science can't notice. Faith let us understand the human being and its dignity. In Jesus Christ, we can not only have an answer to all human questions, but also gives us an appropriate vision of the human being itself.

16. But it is necessary to "renew", I mean, to convert. For this reason, from a theological reading of the pandemic, and from faith, we realize that the key to interpreting it, it's not power, but heart conversion, it is necessary to change one's heart to change reality, to change the world.

17. Trying to interpret the pandemic from power or from a political action, such as a theory of conspiracy or an emotional ideology or just from economy, for sure, neither the diagnosis will not be the right one, nor do the practical actions respond to the challenge.

18. Faith gives us certainty about the deep sense of our own humanity; it will also help us to understand the meaning of this global challenge of the pandemic and to see clearly the practical actions to respond with real actions.

III. The principles of the Christian Social Doctrine.

19. The Church through her Magisterium, throughout history, always attentive to the signs of the times, has declared her intimate union with the human family: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anguish of the men of our times, especially of those who are poor or suffer, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anguish of the followers of Christ. Indeed, there is nothing truly human that doesn’t find an echo in his heart. (Gaudium et spes, 1)

20. In this sense, if we now focus our gaze on the teaching of the Church, we focus on its Social Doctrine. Remember that in 2004 the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church was published, and if we look at its structure, we’ll realize how faith, illuminated from the Gospel, helps us to interpret the world scene and shows us in the depth, the reason to be and being in the world, like Christ and with the grace of God, we can move to build a better world.

21. Its fundamental presuppositions are: God's love plan with respect to man and society, the mission of the Church and the nature of the Social Doctrine, the human person and its rights, and the principles and values of the social doctrine.

22. The basic themes of the social doctrine are: family, human work, economic life, the political community, the international community, the environment and peace.

23. The Pastoral Action of the Church and the Social Commitment of Christians

24. And the main idea of the whole document leads us: “Towards a civilization of love”.

25. The big challenge for us is “to transform the social reality with the strength of the Gospel, witnessed by women and men who are faithful to Jesus Christ”; It also reminds us that the Church is an expert in humanity, and with hope it keeps on looking at the “new heavens” and the “new earth” (2 Pet 3:13), and it helps man to live his life in a dimension of an authentic sense which finds its fullness in Jesus Christ.

26. By now, we will just write down the principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church synthetically, and we will point out its main characteristics in general, for us to reflect in depth

and for us to be encouraged to respond to the pandemic that we are living, that is, for us to be able to re-interpret the reality of the pandemic lit by these principles.

27. The principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church are: the dignity of the human person, where any other principle and content of the social doctrine has its basis, the common good the subsidiarity, and the solidarity.

28. The Church throughout her history has endeavored, lit by the Spirit, to set these principles and to give them a basis to respond more consistently to the demands of time and the continuous development of the social life. That's why it states: "These principles, expression of the whole truth about man known by reason and faith, are born from "the encounter of the message of the Gospel and from its demands – summarized in the supreme commandment of God's love and the neighbor and in Justice – with the problems coming up in the life of the society. (Compendium of The Social Doctrine of the Church, 160).

29. The most important characteristics of these principles are:

- Their general and fundamental character, since they refer to the social reality as a whole, from interpersonal relationships, between communities or groups, to the relationships between towns and Nations.
- Their permanence in time and their universality of meaning. That is why the Church points them out as "the first and fundamental parameter of reference for the interpretation and evaluation of the social phenomena, which are necessary because they can be deduced by the criteria for the discernment and as a guide in the social actions everywhere (CSDCH, 161).
- Their unity, connection and articulation. They cannot be seen isolated in theory or practice since this leads us to a mutual connection, reciprocity and complementarity.
- The human being, in his own essence and existence, cannot put aside the question of the truth and the meaning of the social life. For this reason, these principles "constitute the first articulation of the truth of the society, which questions every consciousness and invites to interact freely with the others, in full co-responsibility with everybody and also regarding everybody". (CSDCH, 163).

30. These principles have a moral meaning, since they refer, first of all, to the person, with their consciousness, their freedom and their responsibility, a person who interacts with other people to look for the development of a worthy life. It also refers to the personal act of individuals as the first individuals responsible of the social life at any level, as well as to the institutions, with their laws, norms and civil structures.

IV. Building a better world: "Heal the world"

31. Faced with the most pressing issues that the pandemic has highlighted, especially social diseases, the Holy Father Francis proposes that we “reflect and work together, as followers of Jesus who heals, to build a better world, full of hope for future generations ”, (cf. General Audience of August 5, 2020) in the light of the Gospel, the theological virtues and the principles of the social doctrine of the Church. And he invites us to “explore” together how our Catholic social tradition can help the human family to heal this world that suffers from serious diseases, through a cycle of catechesis, given at its General Audiences, which began on August 5, 2020. , from the Library of the Apostolic Palace. To build a better world it is necessary to “Heal the world”.

32. Indeed, following the teachings of the Holy Father, if we want to build a better world, in the face of the challenges of the pandemic and especially of social diseases, it is necessary to “heal the world”; How can we carry out this enormous task? How can we help heal our world today? And the Holy Father proposes to us: “As disciples of the Lord Jesus, who is the physician of souls and bodies, we are called to continue 'his work of healing and salvation' in a physical, social and spiritual sense ”(Catechesis 1, 5 August); also invites:

- Reflect and work together
- As followers of Jesus who heals: having our gaze fixed on Jesus (cf. Heb 12,2); and to be able to have a healing encounter with Jesus, as manifested in the passage of the paralytic of Capernaum (cf. Mk 2-1-12), where Jesus, by healing him, responds to the faith and hope of the people, both those who with love they carry the paralytic, as of the sick man himself. Jesus heals him and not simply from paralysis, but he heals everything, since he forgives his sins and renews the life of the paralytic and his friends.
- In the light of the Gospel, of the theological virtues; an encounter with the Gospel of faith, hope and love invites us to assume a creative and renewed spirit.
- And of the principles of the social doctrine of the Church.

33. Respect for the principles of the social doctrine of the Church, even when the Church administers the healing grace of Christ with the sacraments, and although it offers health services in many corners of the planet, Pope Francis points out, the Church is not an expert in the prevention or care of the pandemic, much less gives specific socio-political indications, since this task is the responsibility of political and social leaders. "However, over the centuries, and in light of the Gospel, the Church has developed some fundamental social principles ... that can help us move forward, to prepare the future we need." (Catechesis August 5, 2020)

34. These principles, which express the virtues of faith, hope and love, are: “the principle of human dignity, the principle of the common good, the principle of preferential option for the poor, the principle of universal destination of goods, the principle of solidarity, subsidiarity, the principle of caring for our common home ”, and that the Holy Father will be developing in his catechesis (to date he has offered us 8 catechesis, in his General Audiences , as of August 5, 2020); These principles will help to heal the personal and social fabric and to build a better world, where all and together, (particularly leaders and those responsible for society) are called “to face together the pressing issues that the pandemic has highlighted, especially social illnesses ”(Catechesis August 5, 2020) and thus“ HEAL THE WORLD ”.

I present below a synthesis of these catechesis (which until September 23, 2020 have been 8):

A. Faith and human dignity
(Catechesis of August 12, 2020, 2):
"Heal our gaze"

35. In addition to the fact that the pandemic has made us look vulnerable, there are other social pathologies, such as the distorted vision of the person, which ignores their dignity, which is treated as an object, to use and discard and see the human being as a good of consumption.

36. It is a blind vision, so it is necessary to heal our eyes, from our faith. Jesus offers us another vision: that of service and of giving his life for others. This puts us in harmony, a harmony created by God that asks us to look at others, the needs of others, the problems of others, be in communion. This harmony leads us to recognize human dignity in each person, who is a social being and called to live this social harmony. As disciples of Christ we cannot be indifferent (I look away) or individualistic (look only at self-interest) to those who suffer.

37. We know that by faith, God has created us in his image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:27), and has given us a unique dignity, and invites us to live in communion with him, with our sisters and brothers, in respect of all creation. In communion and harmony, without these, there is destruction.

38. "Being aware of the dignity of every human being and looking at one's brother and all of creation, provokes a behavior of 'attention, care and amazement'." It leads us to look at our neighbor as a brother, with compassion and empathy, not as a stranger, nor with contempt or enmity.

39. “We need the Lord to “ restore our sight ”to rediscover what it means to be members of the human family. And this look can be translated into concrete actions of compassion and respect for each person and of care and custody for our common home.

B. The preferential option for the poor and the virtue of charity

(Catechesis of August 19, 2020, 3):

"Heal from love."

40. The pandemic has exposed the plight of the poor and the great inequality and discrimination that prevails in the world.

Therefore, the challenge is twofold: to cure the virus and to cure a great virus, that of social injustice, inequality of opportunities, marginalization and the lack of protection of the weakest. The answer lies in the preferential option for the poor that is at the center of the Gospel: Jesus, being rich, became poor in order to enrich us (cf. Phil 2,6-7).

41. It is a key criterion of Christian authenticity (cf. Gal 2,10), since the followers of Jesus are recognized by their closeness to the poor, the little ones, the sick and prisoners, the excluded, the forgotten, who is deprived of food and clothing (cf. Mt 25,31-36); it is the mission of the whole Church. “Each Christian and each community are called to be instruments of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor (EG, 187).

42. What does this imply? Walking together, allowing ourselves to be evangelized by them, allowing ourselves to be “infected” by their experience of salvation, their wisdom and creativity. We need to go to the limits, to the margins, to the existential frontiers. Bringing the peripheries to the center means centering our life on Christ, who "became poor" for us, to enrich us "through his poverty" (cf. 2 Cor 8,9).

43. If we want to return to normality, it cannot be a “normality” that includes social injustices and environmental degradation. It is necessary to build something different, to change the world. For example, the Holy Father says: “It would be sad if the Covid-19 vaccine gave priority to the rich!... And! What a scandal it would be if all the economic assistance that we are seeing... were concentrated on rescuing industries that they do not contribute to the inclusion of the excluded, to the promotion of the least, to the common good or to the care of creation ”.

44. It is necessary to heal the epidemics caused by small invisible viruses, and to heal those caused by the great and visible social injustices. Pope Francis proposes that this be done from the love of God, putting the peripheries in the center and the last in the first place ... and from this concrete love, anchored in hope and founded on faith, a healthier world it will be possible.

C. The universal destination of goods and the virtue of hope.

(Catechesis of August 26, 2020, 4):

"Care for creation and social justice to inspire hope"

45. He invites us to welcome the gift of hope that comes from Christ, in the face of the uncertainty and anguish that the pandemic has caused.

46. The economy is sick: due to the fruit of an unfair economic growth that ignores fundamental human values. In today's world, a very wealthy few own more than all the rest of humanity. It is an injustice that cries out to heaven! In addition, this economic model does not take care of the common home. Social inequality and environmental degradation have the same root: that of the sin of wanting to possess, of wanting to dominate brothers and sisters, of wanting to possess and dominate nature and God himself.

47. "In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common administration of humanity to take care of them" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2402). We are called to protect, care and preserve. There is a relationship of responsible reciprocity, which is a key element of our relationship with land assets. We are stewards of the assets, not the owners.

48. After the crisis of the pandemic, will we continue with this economic system of social injustice and contempt for the care of the environment, creation and the common home? It is necessary to recover the spirit of the first Christian communities, which had a single heart and a single soul, put all their goods in common, bearing witness to the abundant grace of Christ upon them (cf. Acts 4, 32-35), to recover care of creation and social justice, bearing witness to the Resurrection of the Lord, taking care of the goods that the Creator gives us, pooling what we possess in such a way that no one lacks, then we can inspire hope to regenerate a healthier world and fairer.

D. Solidarity and the virtue of faith

(Catechesis of September 2, 2020, 5):

"All together in solidarity."

49. The pandemic has highlighted our interdependence: we are all linked, with each other, in both good and evil. For this reason, to come out of this crisis better, we must do it together, not alone, in solidarity. When we lose interdependence in solidarity, inequality and marginalization increase, the social fabric weakens and the environment deteriorates.

50. The Holy Father insists that the principle of solidarity is more necessary today than ever. In an interconnected way, we experience what it means to live in the same “global village”. It involves creating a new mentality that thinks in terms of community, of priority in the life of all over the appropriation of goods by some. (EG 188). Interdependence, to be supportive and fruitful, needs strong roots in humanity and in nature created by God, it needs respect for faces and the earth.

51. To live solidarity you have to live, not the "sindorme of Babel" (which is when there is no solidarity), but Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit descends, it infuses the strength of God, prompts us to go out, to proclaim Jesus to all. Create unity in diversity and solidarity, create harmony. In Babel there is no harmony. At Pentecost, each one of us is a community instrument who participates in the building of the community.

52. A diversity of solidarity possesses the “antibodies” so that the uniqueness of each one does not get sick of individualism, of selfishness; to heal social structures and processes that have degenerated into systems of injustice and oppression.

53. Solidarity today is the way to travel towards a post-pandemic world, towards the healing of our interpersonal and social illnesses. In the midst of the crisis, a solidarity guided by faith allows us to translate the love of God into our globalized culture, not by building towers or walls, but by weaving community and supporting truly human and supportive growth processes. Solidarity is capable of giving strength, support and meaning to generate new forms of family hospitality, fruitful fraternity and universal solidarity.

E. Love and the common good
(Catechesis of September 9, 2020, 6).
"True love heals"

54. The pandemic affects us all, and to overcome this crisis we must seek the common good among all, unlike those who seek to take advantage of it to obtain economic or political advantages. Others try to divide and foment conflict, or there are those who remain indifferent to the suffering of others.

55. Love and the search for the common good is the Christian response to this situation. True love heals, sets us free, makes us fruitful, expansive and inclusive. Loving as God loves us is not easy, but it is an art that we can learn and improve. To love not only those who love me, but everyone, even those who don't know me, foreigners, or those who have made me suffer. True love also extends to social, cultural and political relationships, as well as the relationship with nature.

56. Coronavirus shows us that the good for everyone is good for all, that the health of each person is also a public good. A healthy society is one that takes care of everyone's health. It is necessary to respond with generous love, without limits and that gives rise to concrete initiatives for the common good.

F. Caring for the common home and contemplative attitude

(Catechesis of September 16, 2020, 7):

"Contemplate a better antidote to take care of our common home."

57. The golden rule of our being men and women, which we need to follow to get out of the pandemic, is to "care" and mutually care for each other, to support the "caregivers" of the weakest, the sick and the elders, and take care of our common home, remembering that the earth and all creatures belong to the Lord who created them and who entrusted them to us to preserve and protect them. We are called to take care of our common home, to respect it and to prevent it from continuing to mistreat it, we do not have the right to prey, exploit and destroy it.

58. Contemplation is the best antidote to caring for and protecting our common home from these abuses. The Lord himself invites us to admire his work in wonder and silence, to be able to recognize in each creature the reflection of his wisdom and goodness. Being contemplative leads us to be responsible, with sustainable lifestyles that respect and protect nature, of which we are also part.

G. Subsidiarity and virtue of hope

(Catechesis of September 23, 2020, 8):

"Be more united"

59. The current crisis is not only a health crisis, but also a social, political and economic one. It is necessary for each of us to assume our responsibility to get out of it. But there are people and social groups that cannot participate in this reconstruction of the common good, because they are marginalized, excluded, ignored, and many of them without freedom to express their faith and values.

60. The principle of subsidiarity is essential, because it promotes social participation, at all levels, which helps to prevent and correct the negative aspects of globalization and the action of governments.

61. This principle helps us to be more united, in such a way that there is a collaboration from the top down, from the central State to the people and from the bottom up: from popular associations upwards, as the contribution of individuals, of the families, associations, companies, all intermediate bodies and also churches.

62. Therefore, the way out of this crisis is solidarity accompanied by subsidiarity, which is the principle that encourages each one to exercise the role that corresponds to him in the task of caring for and preparing the future of society, in the process of regeneration of the towns to which it belongs. No one can be left out. Each one must have the possibility of assuming their own responsibility in the healing processes of the society of which they are part, respecting the autonomy and initiative of all. Subsidiarity allows each one to assume their own role for the care and destiny of society, giving hope in the construction of a healthier and just future.

Conclusion:

63. I end with the words of the Holy Father: Let's learn to dream big! Let's not be afraid to dream big, looking for ideals of justice and social love that are born of hope. Let's not try to rebuild the past (especially the one that was unfair and was already sick)... new things await us. The Lord has promised: "I will make all things new." Let's build the future where the local and global dimension mutually enrich each other, where the beauty and richness of the smaller groups, also of the discarded groups, can flourish because there is beauty there too, and where those who have more commit to serve and give more who has less.