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Cardinal Turkson's Address: Update

Michael Sean Winters | Feb. 23, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

NCR has been given a corrected version of the text of Cardinal Peter Turkson's magnificent address to the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering, held in Washington last week. We reprint it here and hope it will receive the wide distribution it deserves, and that its insights will make tehir way into sermons throughout the land, and especially in Wisconsin!

Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in the United States:
?Protecting Human Life and Dignity: Promoting a Just Economy?

Washington, D.C., 13-16 February 2011

The Legacy of Rerum Novarum:
The Current Challenges of Catholic Social Teaching

I. Introduction

So, introducing these three days of reflection on the protection of human life and the dignity of the human person through the promotion of a more just economy, my role is to apply, however partially this may be, the legacy of Rerum Novarum to current challenges to social ministry as Church programmes which serve in the name of Church here in the United States. I am grateful for the invitation, and wish to commend your gathering in these three days to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that your exchanges, reflections and expression of views may lead, not so much to the strengthening of convictions you already have, as to opening up to expanding viewpoints, patient and sympathetic listening to each other, a deepened appreciation of initiatives, more inter-connections, and a greatly renewed commitment.

From 1992 until 2009, as Archbishop of Cape Coast, my ministry was essentially pastoral, and it touched upon many of the areas of concern and service which you represent: poverty, family, children, education, healthcare, natural resources and the environment, democracy and good governance. Like many others in the Church, nearly all these ministries really flowed out of Rerum Novarum without my being much aware of this legacy.

Now that I have been heading-up the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace for a bit more than a year, my task, like that of the whole Pontifical Council, consists more in study and research into issues than in direct implementation. We do studies and propose policies which would help establish and safeguard the specifically Christian identity and character of the social engagements of the Church; and these, I am discovering, also have deep roots in Rerum Novarum, which continues to nourish our many different Christian responses to the world.

It is my hope, in this introductory presentation, to explore some of the connections between our social ministries and this first official teaching of the Church on how all developments of society should respect and promote the identity and dignity of the human person. I hope we can affirm together the legacy of this first Social Encyclical by recognizing its impact on subsequent Social Teachings of the Church and on the various Social Ministries we engage in. I trust that Rerum Novarum, the great social teaching of Pope Leo XIII, can shed some light on the

identity, character and meaning of what each one is trying so hard to do as Catholic social action or ministry every day, towards a more just world.

Indeed, this week seems dedicated to origins. A few days ago, on Wednesday, I was in Madrid at a Conference celebrating the publication of a new Catholic edition of the Bible by the Spanish Bishops? Conference. My reflection there identified God?s Word in Scriptures, not only as the source of life and nourishment of the Church, but also as the source and content of the Church?s very mission and activity in the world, indeed, the Church?s commitment in the world. It was to say that Scriptures reveal God?s own commitment to creation, the work of his hands. As such they provide blueprints and models for the Church?s own engagements and commitments in the world.

Now it is exactly the Church?s commitment in the turbulent world of the 1890s that Pope Leo XIII first expressed and explained. With his encyclical Rerum Novarum, he wrote the brilliant first chapter of the ongoing book called Catholic Social Teaching which all of us here are still engaged in writing and applying in thousands of real situations in our daily ministry.

With this background, let us situate the three days of work ahead of us:
? This meeting is taking place in Washington, D.C., the epicentre of American discourse on what makes up a just society and how that society is to be guided.
?We are meeting to reflect on the legacy of Rerum Novarum in this District of Columbia which hosts the struggle between Church principles and legal debate over what we mean by justice that is social, the meaning of democratic ideals, the concept of serving people by creating the best society possible, the realization of the common good through principles like the universal destination of the goods of the earth, etc.
?We participants come from a wide range of backgrounds, professions, and varying works and ministries in the Church.
?We are focusing on promoting a more just economy, indeed, on impacting our society by living Christian faith and the charity of Christ at a time of great financial difficulty not only in the United States, but in the world.
?Among us are those engaged in social services, advocacy, policy analysis, the formulation and promotion of legislation. We are people committed to many important social issues in our world.
?In all of these works, we genuinely are the actual, living Body of Christ in this world.
?Meeting to reflect on our commitment to struggle with how Christian faith and the charity and justice of Christ are to be lived in the practical order, we are focusing on protecting human life and dignity.
?God is with us to lead and inspire this journey.

II. The Legacy of Rerum Novarum in Catholic Social Teaching:

And so let us talk about this journey with God and each other. And let us explore the legacy of Rerum Novarum to provide an inspiration for our concerns and how we might envision that inspiration in our future work.

A legacy is a heritage that is kept and passed on to the new generation. In this light, I suggest we explore the legacy of Rerum Novarum along two lines:
a.tfirstly by briefly observing how it has engendered a tradition of social doctrine or teaching in the Church, which subsequent Popes have built upon to the latest social encyclical of Benedict XVI, Caritas in veritate; and
b.tsecondly by observing the legacy of Rerum Novarum in our social ministries, that is, the legacy of Rerum Novarum that we are.

The social teachings of the Popes, from Leo XIII to Benedict XVI, express the legacy of Rerum Novarum and a tradition of social teaching in the Church. In them the insights of theology, philosophy, economics, ecology and politics have been harnessed coherently to formulate a social teaching that places the human person, his full and integral development, at the centre of all world systems of thought and activity.

The res socialis, human society, the contextual reference of the Church?s Social Teaching, has developed over the years. The topics have shifted from the misery of workers in the days after the industrial revolution and the emergence of Marxism (Pope Leo XIII), the crisis of 1929 (Pope Pius XI), decolonization and appearance of ?third worldism? (Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI), the fall of the Berlin wall and political changes in Eastern Europe (Pope John Paul II) to globalization, under-development, financial, economic, moral and anthropological crisis of Pope Benedict XVI. In these changing situations, the social encyclicals have fulfilled the need to actualize the same principles of the Church?s application of Christian faith and the charity of Christ to the various contexts of human life. So ?the Church?s social doctrine illuminates with an unchanging light the new problems that are constantly emerging.?

?The Church which has long experience in human affairs and has no desire to be involved in the political activities of any nation, seeks but one goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth; to save, not to judge; to serve, not to be served.? Founded to build the kingdom of heaven on earth rather than to acquire temporal power, the Church openly avows that the two powers?Church and State?are distinct from one another; that each is supreme in its own sphere of competency. But since the Church does dwell among men, she has the duty ?of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.?

Accordingly, Paul VI taught that ?Sharing the noblest aspirations of men and suffering when she sees these aspirations not satisfied, [the Church] wishes to help them attain their full realization. So she offers man her distinctive contribution: a global perspective on man and human realities.?

In Caritas in veritate, too, in full harmony with the long tradition of the Church?s social teaching about the human person, Pope Benedict XVI treats the conditions under which the human person develops integrally, in all his dimensions and forms under the challenging ideological conditions of our contemporary and globalized world. He inserts himself fully within the social teachings of Popes before him, referring thus to Vatican II, especially, Gaudium et Spes (1965), and the works of his predecessors, Populorum Progressio (1967) of Pope Paul VI, and Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (1987) of Pope John Paul II, to teach that ?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,? seeking the well-being of the human person, whole and entire.

The earthly city, then, the context or locus of our social ministries, 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. So, if the building of an earthly city which anticipates the universal and heavenly city of God is the goal of the Church?s mission, its commitments and social ministries in the world, then how ? with its ministries ? may the Church go about building this earthly city?

IV. The Legacy of Rerum Novarum in building a better future

In one brief paragraph, only about 130 words, the Holy Father details the qualities and virtues needed for such 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 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.?

No plans or recipes here, the Holy Father 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:
?Begin with a realistic attitude, approaching the difficulties of the present time with discernment
?Ground the work in fundamental values, a new vision for the future
?With confidence rather than resignation, take up the new responsibilities
?Be open to profound cultural renewal, with confidence and hope
?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. 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, over-simplifying ideologies, but with a realistic attitude and with discernment. This is the Church?s duty to scrutinize the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel.

In order to confront the problems of our world we must first study them, we must learn to SEE them clearly and recognize what constitutes injustice at every level. ?Seeing? demands more than a glance based on presumptions of ideology or prejudice or even political affiliation like Republican or Democrat. 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. Beside 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 which often is a collaborative task ? emerges a way forward and proposals of what to do and how to ?act?.

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).

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. 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.? ?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.?

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.

Those who promote peaceful transformation of the world in a convincing way have usually worked to transform oppressive and violent tendencies in themselves, and thus have become credible 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; and at its centre is the human person.

Vision, or a sense of mission, as the third competence necessary for building a more just and peaceful society, requires 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 industrial and scientific revolution irreversibly changed western humanity?s picture of the world and man?s place in it. The earth got reduced to a collection of material objects, structured like a machine and treated as such, rather than recognizing the intrinsic worth of every human 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. 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. The sense of common good is increasingly lost sight of.

But ?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.?

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.

If we resign ourselves to fatalism, this can have drastic consequences for our overall wellbeing and that of others. On the contrary and despite the naysayers, economic resources do 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. And 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.

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.?

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.?

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

V. The Legacy of Rerum Novarum that You are:

Another way of describing the legacy of Rerum Novarum is to see how we do what we do as heirs of that great social teaching; and it is to see how, with our activities, we contribute to the continuous writing of the Book of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Thus, not only are our ministries a living legacy of Rerum Novarum as products of the 120 years of reflection and action which were formulated in Rerum Novarum; but we ministers also are a living legacy of Rerum Novarum because we carry on the evolution of the work for justice ? through the past 120 years ? as ever better addressing the world?s most basic questions: How shall we live together? What shall we hope for? And what shall we aspire after?

Indeed, Pope Leo XIII considered the involvement of Catholics in social matters as central and critical, as his intention for lay people, religious men and women, priests and Bishops. His intention and spirit for all of them is this participative involvement.

Ss we reflect on Rerum Novarum, it is important to remember that, in the years prior to 1891, in the Church in England, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and North America, numerous statements were published while new activities emerged undertaken by the laity, religious, priests and Bishops. All of these were directly addressing social questions. This history provides us with a glimpse of how renewal in the Church is often anticipated by the concrete actions of the faithful before its the eventual official expression by the hierarchy. During his long life, Pope Leo XIII took the time to meet the people who effected change. Of these people he encountered who inspired his writings, he says: ?Those Catholics are worthy of all praise ? and they are not a few ? who, understanding what the times require, have striven, by various undertakings and endeavours, to better the condition of the working class by rightful means. They have taken up the cause of the working man, and have spared no efforts to better the condition both of families and individuals; to infuse a spirit of equity into the mutual relations of employers and employed; to keep before the eyes of both classes the precepts of duty and the laws of the Gospel ? that Gospel which, by inculcating self-restraint, keeps men within the bounds of moderation, and tends to establish harmony among the divergent interests and the various classes which compose the body politic.?

Again at the end of the encyclical, he affirms the same importance of those who work for justice: ?Every minister of holy religion must bring to the struggle the full energy of his mind and all his power of endurance. Moved by your authority, venerable brethren, and quickened by your example, they should never cease to urge upon men of every class, upon the high-placed as well as the lowly, the Gospel doctrines of Christian life; by every means in their power they must strive to secure the good of the people; and above all must earnestly cherish in themselves, and try to arouse in others, charity, the mistress and the queen of virtues.?

And so Pope Leo XIII?s words are also speaking to us in this time. We are involved in the legacy when, gleaning the fruits of endeavours undertaken with creativity and innovativeness, we provide new trajectories and challenging forms of social ministry for the institutional Church to better people?s conditions. We are involved in the legacy when we are engaged in the struggle for a faith that does justice, and when we challenge our fellow Christians, and indirectly our fellow citizens, to live the Gospel message.

VI. The American Church?s Contribution to the Legacy of Rerum Novarum:

Historically in the United States, many new social problems have emerged since the time of Rerum Novarum; and their solution and resolution were guided by its teaching. To name just a few examples, there was the way U.S. Catholics protested against racial discrimination, with some like Fr. John LaFarge who led with ideas; or Fr. John Courtney Murray who fought for a better educational system and more complete understanding of religious liberty; or the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops who made it possible for American trade unions better to comprehend the stakes of the Cold War. We also recall how the Bishops of the United States really contributed to the founding of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace when they submitted to the Council Vatican II the amendment on this subject contained in Gaudium and Spes and addressed very early the

apostolate of the laity. Catholic laity in the United States significantly contributed to action in order to address many emerging justice issues. This two way-dialogue of reflection and action made significant impact on the world, squarely placed the Catholic Church at the centre of social change, and exerted such a powerful institutional influence.. As Church we have a lot to be proud of and you, as Catholic residents and citizens of the United States, must be particularly proud. We must renew our commitment to this approach in the promotion of social change.

In the modern history of the Catholic Church in the United States, I was very moved and encouraged by what happened on Ash Wednesday of 2006. Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles confronted the U.S. government on the hotly debated issue of the need to reform the Immigration Law of the House of Representatives (HR 4437) stating that he ?would provide instructions to the Archdiocese and lay Catholics to ignore the requirements of (HR 4437).? Now, even more importantly, a grass-roots movement started across the United States to uphold the rights of immigrants. And you all know what this means. What started one day with the courage of a Cardinal in California has spread through the U.S.A. to effect social change. How powerful are the new idioms of communication and indeed prophetic action.

VII. Conclusion:

Before closing, I would like to recall the sense, suggested above, of legacy. What, after all, is a legacy? It is an inheritance, it is the family?s treasure passed on from generation to generation. And so you see, we of Catholic social ministries, the promoters of reconciliation, justice and peace in the name of the Church, are the heirs, the inheritors, the sons and daughters ? probably the great grandchildren ? of Rerum Novarum! As such heirs of a rich social teaching, our ?Christian communities with their patrimony of values and principles, [need to contribute] much to making individuals and peoples aware of their dignity, the establishment of democratic institutions and the recognition of human rights and their corresponding duties,? as Benedict XVI exhorted everyone at the beginning of this year in his Peace Message.

The first two words of the encyclical, which give it its name, are ?rerum novarum? literally, ?of new things?, but translated into English as ?revolutionary change? and into French as ?innovations?. Thinking of your social ministry, how would you now translate ?rerum novarum?? Some say there is nothing new, it is always the same old injustice, the same old suffering, the same old sin, and the same old organizational problems. Others say that one change after another coming at such high speed, makes it impossible to do good social ministry, so why even bother trying? Maybe after considering the broad sweep of the encyclical and the light it sheds on our different situations in the United States and the Catholic Church here, we would conclude that ?the new things? are neither all good or all bad in themselves, but very much depend on how we use well-tested competencies on emerging new problems ? how we respond with our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, our one Lord and Saviour.

In conclusion, let our ?Christian communities, with their patrimony of values and principles, contribute to making individuals and peoples aware of their dignity, the establishment of democratic institutions and the recognition of human rights and their corresponding duties.? May God guide and inspire your work these three days!

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
(President, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace).

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