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***The Social Repercussions of the Kerygma:
Paths of Inclusion for the Poor***

The joy of the Gospel transforms life in the furthest peripheries of existence

“The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy” (§ 21). With this sentence of *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis inspired this entire Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities which I am honoured to address.

The keynote conferences and the panels have already explored many dimensions of the evangelizing or missionary vocation of ecclesial movements and new communities. Your identity, formation and ministries have been amply explored in the previous sessions. This afternoon we have the opportunity to reflect together on the social implications and repercussions of the Kerygma.

After recalling (I.) some key ideas about the Kerygma, it will be Pope Francis who maps (II.) today’s peripheries of existence. We then propose (III.) a method of evangelization meant to be socially engaged and socially inclusive. Our conclusion (IV.) will return to the real joy of the Gospel, which is hope for the Church and all peoples.

I. Kerygma

John preached a baptism of repentance. Those touched by his preaching asked him, “What then shall we do?” The Baptist urged them to live out their conversion in their daily relationships of justice and generosity, each one according to their own vocation.

Jesus Christ himself announced the Good News of God’s Kingdom. He invited His listeners and disciples to a conversion deep and heartfelt: to become new persons and new communities. The public life of Jesus illustrated the social repercussions of the Kerygma, as “he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil” (*Acts 10:38*).

For the Apostles and their successors to our day, the Kerygma is to announce the Good News of the Kingdom of God and of the Christ event. Such proclamation is accompanied by miracles.¹ The invitation to conversion is directed to everyone.

At the first Pentecost, when they heard the inspired preaching of Peter, the people of Jerusalem and pilgrims from the whole world “were cut to the heart”. They asked, “Brethren, what shall we do?”² From the start, then, to hear the Kerygma means to seek and grasp its social repercussions. It follows that the reliable evidence or pledge of our really having heard the Good News of Jesus Christ, and not some other ‘gospel’ as St Paul would often complain, is that we live out its effects in our conduct within the *brotherhood* and in our treatment of others, especially the poor.

We find this expressed by St John Paul II in his encyclical on the Church’s missionary mandate:

The preaching of the early Church was centered on the proclamation of Jesus Christ, with whom the kingdom was identified. Now, as then, there is a need to unite *the proclamation of the kingdom of God* (the content of Jesus’ own “kerygma”) and *the proclamation of the Christ-event* (the “kerygma” of the apostles). The two proclamations are complementary; each throws light on the other.³

The preaching or proclamation which generates new life in Christ requires, of the individual believer and of the believing community, a coherence between the faith professed and the life lived. The Gospel thereby becomes leaven for the transformation of human relationships interpersonally and in society:

Consistency in behaviour shows what one truly believes, and is not limited only to things strictly church-related or spiritual, but involves men and women in the entirety of their life experience and in the context of all their responsibilities. However worldly these responsibilities may be, their subject remains man, that is, the human being whom God calls, by means of the Church, to participate in his gift of salvation.⁴

The Kerygma, the Good News, have direct consequences in the life of society. It is the task of Catholic social teaching to situate “daily work and struggles for justice in the context of bearing witness to Christ the Saviour”.⁵ Daily life coherent with faith, weekdays consistent with Sunday, means to include the excluded. These are the social consequences of the Kerygma, to which we now turn.

II. Kerygmatic thrust toward the peripheries

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis ends the third chapter with a section entitled “Evangelization and the deeper understanding of the Kerygma” (§§ 160-175). Here the Holy Father, with reference to Moses approaching the Burning Bush (*Ex* 3:5), graphically invites us “to remove our sandals

1 E.g. Acts 10: 32-25; 36-43; 20:7-12; 28:7-10.

2 Cf. Carlo Maria Martini, *Che cosa dobbiamo fare?* Piemme, 1995.

3 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, § 16.

4 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 70.

5 John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, § 5; cf. *Compendium*, § 67.

before the sacred ground of the other” and to approach with a steady and confident pace, “reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life” (§ 169).

This is indeed the essential precursor step towards Chapter Four, “The Social Dimension of Evangelization” (§§ 176-258), the specific theme of the present conference. “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” (§ 178).⁶ Meditating on several scriptural texts helps us to ponder “this inseparable bond between our acceptance of the message of salvation and genuine fraternal love”:

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” (*Mt* 25:40). The way we treat others has a transcendent dimension: “the measure you give will be the measure you get” (*Mt* 7:2). It corresponds to the mercy which God has shown us: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you... For the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (*Lk* 6:36-38).

What these passages make clear is the absolute priority of *going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters* as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God’s completely free gift. For this reason, “the service of charity is also a constituent element of the Church’s mission and an indispensable expression of her very being.”⁷ By her very nature the Church is missionary; she abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes (§ 179).

A true understanding of the social repercussions of the Kerygma starts with the faith experience of the ecclesial community itself. People respond to God’s revelation of his love and truth in Jesus; they are transformed by the power of God’s word; and they are re-socialized by His love in the Holy Spirit. This new social reality, the ecclesial community, proclaims the love, compassion and truth of the Trinitarian life which surrounds it.⁸

Thus, the ministry of Jesus inspired the early Churches, including those founded by Paul, in their dedication to the Word of God (*kerygma*), communion or fellowship (*koinonia*), and serving the needy (*diakonia*).⁹ The corporal works of mercy, called *diakonia* in the early Church, were handed down by the Apostles, enriched by the Fathers of the Church, and further explored by the great Christian doctors, and down through the ages, holy men and women, dioceses, ecclesial movements and religious orders, inspired by faith and charity, carried out every imaginable form of service to the poor and the needy, including prisoners and refugees, the sick and dying, pilgrims and slaves, and so on and on. Thus, Christianity could not consider itself simply “a room for prayer” but must,

6 Cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, § 18.

7 Benedict XVI, *Motu Proprio Intima Ecclesiae Natura*, 11.11.2012.

8 Cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, § 54 where Benedict XVI uses the Trinity to illustrate the inclusion-in-relation of all individuals and peoples within the one community of the human family.

9 Cf. *Acts* 2:44-47; 4:32-35

as Blessed John Paul II insisted, “be inserted in daily life and oriented to reforming the social reality. Human and Christian responsibility need to be exercised in these places: in family and in Church, in work and in politics.”¹⁰

Such compassionate, charitable and practical responses to the condition of man in the light of Christian faith and love continued with countless actors and protagonists – some lay, some religious order and some ecclesial movements – down through the ages. Their very many and high varied response influenced Catholic spirituality, theology and especially moral theology; they expressed the Church’s sense of alliance with – and responsibility for – man, society, the world. Eventually, as human awareness of social dynamics emerged in social philosophy and the social sciences, so reflection on the Church’s social praxis began to feed into her *social teachings* where this praxis found explicit formal expression.¹¹

The Kerygma, the Word of God truly proclaimed, always manifests God’s love for the *anawim*, be they the poor, widows, the sick, orphans, strangers, foreigners, whoever may be excluded from society. Its faith experience leads the ecclesial community to grasp the social repercussions of the Kerygma.

Yes, the Gospels disturb. When Jesus healed on the Sabbath, there was criticism. When Jesus had supper at the tax-collector’s, there was criticism. When the Good Samaritan recognized the needy man as his neighbour, there was effort, risk, interruption, expense. All these are uncomfortable. But the Gospel impels us to centre ourselves, not *in* our comfort zone but *beyond* it. Absurd? Why would anyone want to be centred among the hungry or naked or imprisoned? What foolishness! And yet, having encountered Jesus, to whom else and where else should we go?

The Church and her ministry are *an extension of Christ* in history. Accordingly, she responds to a basic call to transcendence, and she must not shrink from being deeply involved pastorally in every corner of society, especially where people most suffer. The Church, Pope Francis explained to the FAO two days ago, “always tries to be attentive, prompt and helpful with regard to everything having to do with people’s spiritual and material wellbeing, especially those who are excluded and live on the margins, so that their security and their dignity be guaranteed.”¹²

What does the Holy Father mean by *margins*? There are many forms and types: the ghettos, the outskirts, the bidonvilles, hinterlands, slums, fringes, wherever is out of bounds: for example, the so-called ‘temporary’ camps where exiles, driven from their land, forever languish; the walls which stigmatize and hide those who have a disease or handicap; the anonymity hiding young people who cannot find work...

10 John Paul II, *Homily* at the Beatification of Adolfo Kolping (1813-1865), 27.10.1991.

11 The social teaching of the Church has its roots in the Old and New Testaments and the tradition of moral philosophy and theology. It falls within the Church’s right and obligation to preach the Gospel and proclaim moral principles “in respect of the social order” (*Code of Canon Law*, can. 747. Catholic Social Doctrine in its modern form is usually considered to begin with the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII. Since then, for more than 120 years, the social doctrine has been developing with documents from Vatican II, the Holy Fathers, the Holy See, Conferences of Bishops and individual Bishops. Two good histories are Joseph Höffner, *Ordo Socialis: Christian Social Teaching*, Cologne, 1983; and Jean-Yves Calvez S.J., ed., *Le Discours social de l’Église Catholique: de Léon XIII à Benoît XVI*, Paris : Bayard Montrouge, 2009.

12 Pope Francis, *Address* to the Plenary of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome, 20.11.14; cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, § 53-54.

What is the Christian contribution to changing unjust social structures? Since the effort to overcome injustice is usually undertaken with others, what would be the specifically Christian contribution? The specifically Christian contribution is *to denounce* and *to announce*.

- a) To denounce as unacceptable the exclusion, frustration, suffering, and to identify their sinful roots, the unjust structures ...
- b) To announce the gospel of hope, promoting dialogue, collaboration and reconciliation.

To announce and denounce are done “with candour, to openly demonstrate the contradictions and injustices, but always with compassion and constructive intent. Charged with the Spirit of love, we can be signs and instruments of God who loves, who serves, who gives life.”¹³

The peripheries, then, become places or situations of prayerful respect, of disturbance and compassion, of courage and commitment ... where Christ has need of us.

III. A Method of Evangelization

To evangelize the social order, Saint John XXIII adopted the method developed by Fr. Joseph-Léon Cardijn, later Cardinal, and gave it formal recognition in *Mater et Magistra*. After reviewing the principles of Catholic social doctrine, with particular emphasis on human dignity and the common good, Good Pope John proposes three stages for putting these social principles into practice:

First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act.¹⁴

You are surely familiar with these three useful steps. Today I would like to expand them into five orientations. These emphasize the *solidarity* that should characterize our relations with everyone, especially those on the periphery:

1. First, it is indispensable for us to orient ourselves through **prayer**. For it is Christ himself who impels us toward the peripheries. When we get there, we find Him already at work amongst the impoverished and the marginalized, His brothers and sisters ... We constantly need to be in communion with Him.

With the grace of being sent or missioned, then, “each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel” (§ 20).

To go forth we need our feet, not necessarily an airplane! Feet are needed to take us from our comfort zone towards the peripheries that are unfamiliar.

Pope Francis: “We must become courageous Christians and go in search of the people who are the very flesh of Christ!”¹⁵ The Holy Spirit “grants us the courage to take to the streets of the world,

¹³ Pope Francis, *Homily*, Pentecost 8.06.2014.

¹⁴ John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, § 236.

bringing the Gospel! The Holy Spirit makes us look to the horizon and drive us to the very outskirts of existence in order to proclaim life in Jesus Christ.”¹⁶

Now many communities and movements, thanks to the charism of their founders, may feel they have already discovered and identified their “own” peripheries where they typically serve. Pope Francis suggests this question: “Do we tend to stay closed in on ourselves, on our group, or do we let the Holy Spirit open us to mission?”¹⁷

2. Next, instead of “look” or “see”, our orientation would be **to encounter** and **to listen**.

Pope Francis insists, “Because faith is an encounter with Jesus, and we must do what Jesus does: encounter others... we must go out to meet them, and with our faith we must create a ‘culture of encounter’, a culture of friendship, a culture in which we find brothers and sisters...” And this brings us to another important point: “encountering the poor. If we step outside ourselves we find poverty.”¹⁸

Within the culture of encounter, then, if I may use a common expression, it’s essential to shut up and listen. Let the marginalized speak, let them show you, let them teach you. With their help, you will begin to see – but differently from using one’s habitual tools of perception and analysis. *They need to be protagonists of their own development.*¹⁹

Who are at the peripheries? Those “who suffer inequality and exclusion in their own flesh.” Yet these “realities are often silenced” and rendered invisible.²⁰ The media don’t seem to see or hear, the political and economic decision-makers do not seem to see or hear, and public opinion fails to take notice or looks the other way. Like in the story of the Good Samaritan, the Levite and the publican who “passed by on the other side” represent all those who just look away (Lk 10: 31).

The necessary social analysis uncovers the economic, political and social causes of poverty, inequality, and marginalization. The Christian vision looks more deeply into the human heart. There it discovers the egoism, greed, selfishness and other vices which give rise to the many great ills of inequity, exploitation, violence, and so on. To transform society, then, it is necessary to transform the human heart.

3. The next step is usually “judge”. Let us deepen and expand it by means of three complementary terms: to **dialogue** together, to **discern** together, do **decide** together. Notice how different this is from other instances of judging – the scientist judges an experiment, the referee judges whether the

15 Pope Francis, *Dialogue with ecclesial movements*, 18.05.2013.

16 Pope Francis, *Homily*, Pentecost, 19.05.2013.

17 Pope Francis, *Homily*, Pentecost, 19.05.2013.

18 Pope Francis, *Dialogue with ecclesial movements*, Pentecost, 18.05.2013.

19 Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Political and Civil Authorities and to the Diplomatic Corps*, Luanda, 20.03.2009, on the need for protagonism on the part of receivers of assistance: “...that African nations be seen not simply as the receivers of others’ plans and solutions. African men and women themselves, working together for the good of their communities, should be the primary agents of their own development.”

20 Pope Francis, *Address to participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements*, Old Synod Hall, 28.10.2014.

ball went out of bounds, the courtroom judge pronounces on guilt or innocence. When you dialogue, discern and decide together with others, the usual distance of judging fades away. Pope Francis urges us to pay close attention. Speaking to the FAO:

Someone starving is there, at the street-corner, asking for citizenship, asking to be considered in his/her condition, to receive basic healthy nourishment. These people are just asking for dignity. They beg us for dignity, not for charity. The people are not asking for anything other or less than dignity. They want dignity, not a hand-out! This is your work: to help so that their dignity may arrive.²¹

At the FAO, the Pope focused on hunger. Here are other great issues at stake on the peripheries:

... to struggle against the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, lack of land, lack of housing, the denial of social and labour rights.
... to confront the destructive effects of the empire of money: forced displacements, heart-breaking emigrations, human traffic, drug traffic, war, violence, and all those realities which [the marginalized] suffer and which we are all called to transform.²²

4. Now it is not enough simply to act. Instead, our commitment should be to **accompany** and to **collaborate**. “It is to think and to act in terms of community, the priority of everyone’s life over the appropriation of goods on the part of a few.”²³ This would, indeed, be our Christian response to the ill effects of globalization.

Remember, the Church is not an NGO! Some new communities and ecclesial movements have their own NGOs. But an NGO is a means, a tool or instrument; it should not be our nature as evangelizers or missionaries. “The Church is neither a political movement nor a well-organized structure.... We are not an NGO and, when the Church becomes an NGO, she loses her salt, she has no savour, she is only an empty organization.”²⁴

At the meeting with grass-roots movements, it was heartening to see how deeply they appreciated a Church which accompanies their struggles and co-operates with their efforts.

5. The final orientation is indeed the **joy** of the Gospel.

The mission to the peripheries must be intentional and thoughtful, but without making it rigidly planned. As Jesus travelled about, he would often be stopped by an unplanned encounter. Think of Zacchaeus in a tree, the paralytic dropped down through the roof, the woman suffering from years of haemorrhage, the blind man and so on. To the chagrin of his apostles, who probably had planned the itinerary, Jesus interrupted his journey in order to encounter and to heal. The Kerygma invites us to do likewise, to be constantly alert and receptive, compassionate and respectful.

And so with joy we realize that, for God, the peripheries are not peripheral! On the contrary, those who are poor and suffer often have more space for God than those who prosper and are busy

21 Pope Francis, *Address* to the Plenary of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome, 20.11.14.

22 Pope Francis, *Address* to the World Meeting of Popular Movements, Old Synod Hall, 28.10.2014.

23 Pope Francis, *Address* to the World Meeting of Popular Movements, Old Synod Hall, 28.10.2014.

24 Pope Francis, *Dialogue with ecclesial movements*, Pentecost, 18.05.2013.

succeeding in the terms of the world. They do show us the joy of being brothers and sisters, which is indeed the joy of the Gospel. And this brings me to my conclusion!

IV. Conclusion

The Good News of Jesus Christ, we have seen, orients us to include the poor, whatever the periphery may be. Our approach includes (1) to pray and to go; (2) to encounter and to listen; (3) to dialogue, discern and decide together; (4) to accompany and collaborate; and (5) the joy of the Gospel.

Ever since Vatican II, however, a troublesome dichotomy has often marred Church life. One pole, labelled “faith”, would include things like liturgy, catechetics, personal ministries. There is a risk of other-worldly spiritualism. The polar opposite, labelled “justice”, would include prophecy, organization, public issues, social ministries. There is a risk of this-worldly immanentism.

How to overcome such unhappy factionalism within our Church? What every Holy Father from Blessed Paul VI to our own Pope Francis have encouraged us to do, and what during these reflections we have tried to do, is to return to the sources of our faith in the Scriptures and tradition. Here we rediscover the inseparable unity between the two Great Commandments, between love of God and love of neighbour, between kerygma and liturgia and diakonia.

“When we meet a really needy person,” the Holy Father asks in today’s tweet, “do we recognize in them the face of God?”²⁵ In tomorrow’s Gospel, the people will be asking, “When did we see you hungry, naked or in prison?” (*Mt 25:31-46*).

My dear friends, the openness, competence and sincerity displayed at this Congress have made it a happy task to share these reflections with you. They culminate in this vision of Pope Francis, in which we are invited to take an active part as missionaries, as evangelizers:

How wonderful it is when we see peoples on the move, especially their poorest members and their young. Then, yes, one feels the breeze of promise which brings to life the vision of a better world. May this breeze become a gale of hope. This is my wish.²⁶

May God bless you, your communities and ecclesial movements, as you live out the social repercussions of the Kerygma and contribute to the gale of hope.

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
President

²⁵ Quando noi incontriamo una persona veramente bisognosa, riconosciamo in lei il volto di Dio?
22.11.2014

²⁶ Pope Francis, *Address* to participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements, Old Synod Hall, 28.10.2014.