



NEWMAN LECTURE

Oxford, 3 June 2011

FAITH AND REASON IN PUBLIC LIFE

INTRODUCTION:

Reverend Masters, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I bring you warm greetings from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace; and I thank Master Brendan Callaghan for the invitation to deliver the fourth Newman Lecture.

I wish to begin this address by reading from an article, in French and in Italian, which I stumbled upon this week. Written in 2008, it begins thus: *“Tony Blair converted to Catholicism when he left Number 10 Downing Street. Less well-known is his attachment to the faith and to religion in private and public life. He claims that ‘one cannot attempt to govern the world without understanding what touches people deeply and meets their irresistible aspiration to spirituality’”. The article goes on: “With his conversion, (Mr.) Blair contradicts what our European context has long wanted to hide and what Europeans do not share: that the religions live in the heart of many societies in the world, in the heart of many cultures”*.¹

This paragraph explains why I was happy to accept an invitation to speak about “Faith and Reason in Public Life” here at Oxford, and perhaps why you, Reverend Masters and Distinguished Guests, decided to attend.

Two years after the article, we found ourselves in Hyde Park (18 September 2010), where the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, offered some lessons from the life of

¹ P. DE CHARENTENAY, S.J., “Tony Blair si è convertito al cattolicesimo quando ha lasciato il numero 10 di Downing Street. E meno noto il suo attaccamento alla fede e alla religione nella vita privata e nella vita collettiva. Egli afferma che <<non si può pretendere di governare il mondo senza comprendere ciò che tocca profondamente i popoli e corrisponde alla loro irresistibile aspirazione a una spiritualità>>. Blair con la sua conversione contraddice ciò che il nostro contesto europeo ha voluto a lungo nascondere e ciò che gli europei non condividono: le religioni vivono nel cuore di numerose società nel mondo, nel cuore di molte culture. (“Le religioni nel cuore delle nostre società,” *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3800 [18 Ottobre 2008] cfr. interview in *Le Monde*, 22.07.2008, 16).

Blessed John Henry Newman. He said:

- «Here is the first lesson we can learn from his life: Newman reminds us that, as men and women made in the image and likeness of God, we were created to know the truth, to find in that truth our ultimate freedom and the fulfilment of our deepest human aspirations. In a word, we are meant to know Christ, who is himself “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn.14:6).
- Secondly, Newman teaches us that “if we have accepted the truth of Christ and committed our lives to Him, there can be no separation between what we believe and the way we live our lives». “He saw clearly that we do not so much accept the truth in a purely intellectual act as embrace it in a spiritual dynamic that penetrates to the core of our being”, even if “that passion for the truth, intellectual honesty and genuine conversion are costly”.
- Thirdly, Pope Benedict XVI recalled the words of Newman that «the truth that sets us free cannot be kept to ourselves; it calls for testimony, it begs to be heard, and in the end its convincing power comes from itself and not from human eloquence or the arguments in which it may be couched”.

These three lessons of Blessed Newman – to seek the truth, to live it and witness to it – are lessons that we now want to apply to public life. Beginning with a short consideration of the place of reason in life, we shall proceed to consider the harmony between reason and faith as allies in the search for *truth*. Then, we shall seek the place of faith and reason in public life as contributors of *truth*, and identify the **Social Doctrine of the Church**, as privileged guidelines for living the **truth** of **faith** (Christian faith and the charity of Christ) and **reason** (reality of human life) in public life and in the world.

1. **BEGINNING WITH REASON [Faith and Reason]**

It was Bernard Lonergan who once observed that “*an animal, when sated, goes to sleep. A person, after eating, might wonder: who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? Why is there evil? And after this, what comes next?*” Thus, to be human is to be someone who asks questions and searches for answers,² and this has been so from the beginning.

2 Many of these ideas can be found further developed in the John Paul II, *Fides et ratio* (1998).

History shows that all cultures have journeyed on a path that has brought humanity to progressively encounter the truth and to face it squarely. The more man knows reality and the world, the more he knows himself, and the more pressing becomes the social question and, indeed, the question of man's very existence. These questions are present in the Bible, in the sacred texts of the Hindus, Taoists, Buddhists, etc; and they are found equally in Poems, in the tragedies and in the philosophical treatises of the Ancient Greeks; and they are found in the proverbs and folklore of traditional societies. They are questions that have their common source in the ever-present quest for meaning that throbs in the human heart; and the response to each question, in fact, depends on how one understands one's existence.

To grow in the knowledge of truth so as to make one's life more human, man has many resources. Among these emerges "philosophy", not only understood as the written work of philosophers, but also, as the spontaneous thought that asks about the profound sense of existence and attempts to provide an answer. This human trait of *philosophizing (to question and to seek answers about the how and why of life and reality)* is the noblest task of humanity. Beside this form of truth, we also need those forms which facilitate the living of daily life, such as the important contributions which science and technology, especially in this Modern Age, have made to personal and social development. Vatican II recognized the same, when it observed, «with the passionate exercise of creativity through the centuries [man] has certainly made progress in the empirical sciences, in the technical [sciences] and in the liberal disciplines. In our age, man has achieved noteworthy successes particularly in research and in the domain of the material world.»³

Man, however, is not only and merely matter (material). Accordingly, man also needs to search for the truth in the area of practical morality: how to do good with one's action and ethical conduct. This, in fact, is the way of living that makes for true personal development, the gate towards perfection and the means of happiness. This ethical quest is also a universal reality (phenomenon): all

3 *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 15.

cultures have maxims concerning behaviour whose basic features and outlines are similar. Ethical truth, though, unlike technology (technical truth), is not cumulative with the passage of generations, maintaining the acquired truth of the past and adding new elements. In the area of morality, knowledge is a thing more of the “heart” than of the “intellect”. It is, therefore, a thing to be learnt, accepted and lived from the onset.

The truths about which we have spoken thus far belong to the field of human reason: they can be acquired through the application of natural faculties. However, there are limitations of all types, personal and impersonal, which make it difficult for a human being to find every truth all alone. One such limitation is the immensity of the body of truth that exists as a result of the richness of created reality. It is practically difficult, if not impossible, for any person to acquire all these truths. Thus, it is increasingly the case that the truths which people believe, especially on the authority of other people, are far more numerous than those which they believe as a result of their own verification.

Who would be able to sift through critically the incredible amount of scientific data (conclusions) on which modern life is based? Who could personally check the reliability of the torrents of information that daily arrive at our doorsteps from all parts of the world, and which are accepted mostly as true? And finally, who could remake the journeys of experience and thinking that have led to the accumulated treasures of wisdom and religious experience (spirituality) of humanity? So, man, the being who asks questions and searches for the truth, is also a being who *lives by faith (from believing things)*.

Let us note another limitation to reason, as the only source of *truth*: the fact that human reason cannot grasp every reality does not imply the nonexistence of such reality. A physicist does not deny the existence of psychic phenomena, just because they cannot be observed by the methodology of physics. The study of these phenomena requires another methodology: a methodology that is similar, though not the same, to the one involved in understanding other concepts such as supernatural faith. It is important to note that the truths obtained by the application of a certain methodology, if genuine, cannot be opposed to those obtained by the application of another methodology. Similarly, the truths of faith

cannot be opposed to those of reason; but neither can they also be arrived at by reason alone.

In this regard, Saint Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking about the truths of God, said: «Sometimes I thought I could already grasp what I was looking for, and sometimes it escaped my mind completely. Finally, I gave up hope. I decided to stop looking for something that was impossible to find. But when I tried to stifle that thought altogether, lest by occupying my mind with useless speculation it should keep me from things I could actually accomplish, it began to hound me more and more, although I resisted and fought against it. Then one day, when my violent struggle against its hounding had worn me down, the thing I had despaired of finding presented itself in the very clash of my thoughts, so that I eagerly embraced the thought I had been taking such pains to drive away»⁴. It was for this and many other reasons that Archbishop Anselm entitled his *Proslogion*, "*Fides quaerens intellectum*". Faith and reasoning are inevitably attracted to one another, and there is harmony between them.

2. HARMONY BETWEEN REASON AND FAITH

The existing distinction between the methodologies of the various sciences does not mean that they cannot communicate and are irreconcilable. An interdisciplinary research in this regard is a useful means of obtaining a more complete truth. In that sense, it is a good thing that faith and reason come together to arrive at full truth. In Scripture there is a profound and indissoluble unity between the *knowledge of reason* and that of *faith*. The Bible affirms that faith is essential to better understand the realities of the world, because they also make God known and reveal his works. In this, however, faith neither suppresses the autonomy of reason nor curtails its range of action. When in Sacred Scriptures human beings, the world and the events of history are presented, they are analyzed and assessed with all the endowments of reason, but never to the exclusion of faith. The role of faith in this regard is to refine the inner eye, opening the mind to discover the Providence of God at work. Thus, for example, in the book of Proverbs: "The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps" (16, 9).

4 *Proslogion*, Proemium, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 2001, p. 2.

There is therefore no competition between reason and faith: one requires the other; and each has its own function. The same Book of Proverbs teaches that: "It is the glory of God to conceal things; it is the glory of kings to investigate them." (25, 2). The Lord is the source of all things, in Him is the fullness of meaning, and this is the glory of God; man has the task of searching for the truth with his reason, and this constitutes the nobility of his being.

The desire for knowledge fills man's heart and prompts him vertically towards the infinity of the Unknown, which is the key to the truths of his species and his environment. And how often Blessed Newman stressed this idea! He wrote: «I wish the intellect to range with the utmost freedom, and religion to enjoy an equal freedom; but what I am stipulating for is that they should be found in one and the same place, and exemplified in the same persons. I want to destroy that diversity of centers, which puts everything into confusion by creating a contrariety of influences. I wish the same spots and the same individuals to be at once oracles of philosophy and shrines of devotion. It will not satisfy me, what satisfies so many, to have two independent systems, intellectual and religious, going at once side by side, by a sort of division of labor, and only accidentally brought together. It will not satisfy me, if religion is here, and science there. » ⁵

In our day, the scientific and technical progresses of the past centuries, together with other factors, have favored the predominance of pragmatic reasoning and the erosion of transcendental truths. The consequences have been the separation between faith and reason, ethics and technology, and the birth of a technocratic ideology. ⁶ This ideology is based on the belief that the human being is self-sufficient and able to develop on its own; and this has led to the widespread presumption of total autonomy and a corresponding sense of man's "auto-salvation". Experience shows that this attitude has caused and continues to

⁵ J. H. NEWMAN, *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions*, Longmans, Green, and Co., London 1908, p. 13. This and other citations can be found at: www.newmanreader.org (visited on the 12-IV-2011).

⁶ It is worth recalling, nonetheless, that «a similar attitude does not derive from scientific research and technology, but from a scientist and technocratic ideology that tends to condition it. Science and technology, with their progress, do not eliminate the need for transcendence and are not per se the cause of the exasperated secularization that leads to nihilism; while they advance on their path, they raise questions about their meaning and increase the need to respect the transcended dimension of the human being and of creation itself » Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 462 (from now: *Compendium*).

cause adverse effects on the sense of personal development, social harmony and the care for nature. For example, a person *thinks he owes nothing to anyone, except to himself; and he believes that he only has rights* (Civ.43). There is thus a continuous modern demand for more rights, the removal of every limit, and the progressive widening of the scope of man's action, up to contemplating the idea of self-reproduction. This dynamic, while it closes up man in an egoistic self-production, and prevents him from assuming any duties, without which all rights are sucked into a self-referential spiral which eradicates every meaning.⁷

In a globalized world, this is particularly serious and dangerous. The sense of the *common good* disappears, while man's vision of his true vocation to *authentic and true love, to being a gift, to unity and brotherhood, to solidarity, to transcendence* and to *communion* is beclouded.

This is because "the supremacy of technology tends to prevent people from recognizing anything that cannot be explained in terms of matter alone". It makes modern culture generally diffident about truth, or at least, about the possibility of attaining any profound truths about the human person which show the meaning of life, personal and social, and which orientates his actions. And "yet", as Benedict XVI affirms, "everyone experiences the many immaterial and spiritual dimensions of life.....The development of individuals and peoples is likewise located on a height, if we consider the *spiritual dimension* that must be present if such development is to be authentic. It requires new eyes and new heart capable of *rising above the materialistic vision of human events*, capable of glimpsing in development the 'beyond' that technology cannot give".⁸ It requires the eyes of faith.

Christian doctrine shows that man has always sought and discovered truth deeper than mere functional truths, and that he has a duty to live by that truth. In fact, "Christians, who live in an increasingly globalized society, are called, not only through a responsible civic, economic and political engagement, but also through the witness of their love and faith, to make a valuable contribution to the painstaking and stimulating work of justice, integral human

⁷ Cfr. Fontana, S., *Per una Politica dei doveri*, Siena, Cantagalli, 2006, pg. 12.

⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Enc. *Caritas in veritate*, n. 77.

development and the proper ordering of human affairs."⁹ It is therefore necessary to cultivate a wise system of reasoning and thinking that is open to faith, taking into account the full truth about man.¹⁰ The path, then, of the human being through life is in the embrace of both *faith* and *reason: faith and reasoning helping one another*.¹¹ In this regard, it is also valuable to recall a wish of blessed Newman: «I want a laity, not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious, but men who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold, and what they do not, who know their creed so well, that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it. I want an intelligent, well-instructed laity; [...] I wish you to enlarge your knowledge, to cultivate your reason, to get an insight into the relation of truth to truth, to learn to view things as they are, to understand how faith and reason stand to each other, what are the bases and principles of Catholicism»¹²

More close to our days, Francis Joseph Sheed, “the Prophet of Hyde Park”,¹³ believed that «in order to “see” things the way they really are, one needs to exercise the mind, to dust off the intellect and apply it to the world around us». This is because, for Sheed, the human intellect “is an indispensable instrument for navigating our journey through life, but it isn’t the only tool God has given us. Divine revelation is God’s gift to the human mind. It provides information that, left to its own powers, even the keenest human intellect could never discover. And it further illuminates those areas man’s mind has reached through its own natural powers. Revelation leads the mind to the proper conclusions. »¹⁴

Thus the separation between faith and reason, and the exclusion of religion from public life¹⁵, give public life less space to open towards transcendence.

⁹ BENEDICT XVI, *Message for World Peace Day 2011*, n. 7.

¹⁰ Vatican Council II which, as already mentioned, exalts and promotes human progress also in the technical field, underlines that «our age, even more than past centuries, needs this knowledge to humanize all its new discoveries. The future of the world is in danger, in fact, unless wiser men do not come forth. » *Gaudium et spes*, n. 15.

¹¹ BENEDICT XVI, Enc. *Caritas in veritate*, n. 74.

¹² J. H. NEWMAN, *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England*, IX, Longmans, Green, and Co., London 1908, p. 390. This text was cited, in part, by Benedict XVI in the homily pronounced during his Beatification 19 settembre 2010.

¹³ P. MADRID, *The Prophet of Hyde Park*, in “Crisis Magazine”, 20, 3 (March 2002) pp. 30-35.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33-34.

¹⁵ «How to deny the contribution of the great religions of the world to the development of civilization? The true search for God has led to a greater respect for the dignity of man. The Christian community, with its patrimony of

Without this primary experience, it is difficult to orientate society towards universal ethical principles and very hard to create national and international realities where fundamental freedoms and rights can become fully recognized and fulfilled. Newman thus believed that: «If there be Religious Truth at all, we cannot shut our eyes to it without prejudice to truth of every kind, physical, metaphysical, historical, and moral; for it bears upon all truth».¹⁶ Benedict XVI, on his part, goes to great length to show that both faith and reason have the task of assessing the adequacy of the other: «*Reason always stands in need of being purified by faith*: this also holds true for political reason, which must not consider itself omnipotent. For its part, *religion always needs to be purified by reason* in order to show its authentically human face. Any breach in this dialogue comes only at an enormous price to human development».¹⁷

Thus *faith* and *reason* are and must be allies in humanity's search for the *truth*. Accordingly, it is important to have the ethical contribution of religion in the political sphere; and religion, faith's contribution to the search for *truth*, should not be marginalized or prohibited, but perceived as a valid contribution towards the promotion of the common good.

3. TRUTH: THE SERVICE OF FAITH AND REASON TO PUBLIC LIFE

The reality of our society and world shows that a coercive external system is not enough for the development of a "good society". There is the need for an internalization of moral behaviors, in order to ensure the general spiritual growth of people, as well as social structures. In fact, people, in public life, behave in accordance with their vision of the world, of humankind, and of the common good. Therefore, a community that is not founded on truth usually tends to decline, while, on the other hand, the more people and institutions are committed to seeking the truth, the more they attain true well being on a personal and social

values and principles, has strongly contributed to the conscience raising of persons and peoples regarding their own identity and dignity, as well as to the conquest of democratic institutions and to the affirmation of the rights of man and of his corresponding duties.» BENEDICT XVI, *Message for World Peace Day 2011*, n. 7. This does not mean however that faith guarantees the building of a perfect society: only immanent ideologies censure the possibility of a "heaven on earth". Faith, on the contrary, states that this is not feasible (cfr. JOHN XXIII, Enc. *Mater et magistra*, AAS 53 [1961] 451), but at the same time sustains hope in a better world, notwithstanding the sin and repeated failures that can be found in history, and thus instilling a perennial and profound motivation to realize social commitments.

¹⁶ J. H. NEWMAN, *The Idea of a University*, Longmans, Green, and Co., London 1907, p. 52.

¹⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Enc. *Caritas in veritate*, n. 56.

levels, reducing despotism and quarrels.¹⁸ Newman also saw this. “As we advance in the perception of the Truth”, he wrote, “we all become less fitted to be controversialists”.¹⁹ And in another instance of the convergence of his thought with that of Blessed Newman, Pope Benedict XVI writes, “*Truth*, in fact is *logos* which creates *dia-logos*, and hence, communication and communion. Truth, by enabling men and women to let go of their subjective opinions and impressions, allows them to move beyond cultural and historical limitations and to come together in the assessment of the value and substance of things. Truth opens and unites our minds in the *logos* of love...” (Civ.4). It is, therefore, necessary to “give credibility to truth, demonstrating its persuasive and authenticating power in the practical setting of social living. This is a matter of no small account today, in a social and cultural context which relativizes truth, often paying little heed to it and showing increasingly reluctance to acknowledge its existence”²⁰

This *credible truth in the practical setting of society* does not refer only to technical truths. It refers also to the truth of wisdom and morality; wherefore, as Pope Paul VI once observed: “If further development calls for the work of more and more technicians, even more necessary is the deep thought and reflection of wise men in search of new humanism which will enable modern man to find himself anew by embracing the higher values of love and friendship, of prayer and contemplation”.²¹ Likewise, in his meeting with the Bishops of the United Kingdom last September, Pope Benedict recalled that in their work: “*Choosing the Common Good*”, the Bishops had underlined the importance of the practice of virtue in public life. The Pope commended them and added: “Today’s circumstances provide a good opportunity to reinforce that message, and, indeed, to encourage people to aspire to higher moral values in every area of their lives, against a background of growing cynicism regarding even the possibility of virtuous living”. It is, therefore, necessary to cultivate a conception of wisdom and truth (of all types – political, economic, ecological etc. -) open to faith and taking into account the full truth about man.²² For the development of a “good society”,

¹⁸ Cfr. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 16; *Compendium*, n. 98.

¹⁹ J. H. NEWMAN, *Via Media*, vol. I, Longmans, Green, and Co., London 1901, p. 69.

²⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Enc. *Caritas in veritate*, n. 2

²¹ PAUL VI, Enc. *Populorum progressio*, n. 20.

²² Cfr. Vatican Council II which, as already mentioned, exalts and promotes human progress also in the technical field, underlines that «our age, even more than past centuries, needs this knowledge to humanize all its new

morality needs to find expression in public life, and not be excluded or privatized.

Indeed, «politics and diplomacy should look to the moral and spiritual patrimony offered by the great religions of the world in order to acknowledge and affirm the universal truths, principles and values, which cannot be denied without denying the dignity of the human person. But what does it mean, in practical terms, to promote moral truth in the world of politics and diplomacy? It means acting in a responsible way on the basis of an objective and integral knowledge of the facts; it means deconstructing political ideologies which end up supplanting truth and human dignity in order to promote pseudo-values under the pretext of peace, development and human rights; it means fostering an unswerving commitment to base positive law on the principles of Natural law. All of this is necessary and consistent with the respect for the dignity and worth of the human person ...». ²³

To translate public commitment into an efficacious action, one needs adequate technical competence and clarity of discernment. But one also needs moral qualities; and this is where Christians can make a difference, as Benedict XVI told them in Verona, Italy some years ago (2006). It is, indeed, a Christian responsibility, “not through our poor resources, but with the power that is given by the Holy Spirit – to give positive and convincing answers to the questions of our people: if we will know how to do so, the Church will respond with a great service ... to the world, as the trap of secularism is everywhere, and there is the universal necessity of living the faith in relation to the challenges of our times”. ²⁴ In sum, in order to attain the integral development of the human person, as well as social harmony, it is essential to create a healthy dialogue between faith and reason, between civil and religious institutions; and here is an example from this city: ***An example of public dialogue:***

Last September, in Hyde Park, 80,000 members of the Catholic Community awaiting the Holy Father’s arrival, took part in “Stand-up against poverty”. This

discoveries. The future of the world is in danger, in fact, unless wiser men do not come forth. » *Gaudium et spes*, n.15.

²³ BENEDICT XVI, *Message for World Peace Day 2011*, n. 12.

²⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Speech in Verona*, 19-X-2006.

Action anticipated the U.N. General Assembly in New York to review the Millennium Development Goals, solemnly pledged ten years earlier. Could real progress still be made to overcome poverty for the poorest and most disadvantaged throughout the world? Could these promises be fulfilled by 2015?

This is the message that was sent from Hyde Park to the Summit: “The Catholic Church worldwide, together with many faith communities, has been committed to making [the Millennium] promises a reality. We have been invited to stand up against poverty, and to send our message, inspired by the Gospel. So, together we stand with millions of people around the world. We stand to show our commitment to tackle poverty and injustice. We stand to say to the world’s leaders: *Keep your promises.*”

This message they entrusted to me, due to leave a few hours later for New York as head of the delegation of the Holy See. Two days later, I delivered the message in the great hall of the U.N. General Assembly.

In March 2011, I returned to London and found myself in another great hall with about 700 Catholics engaged in youth ministry, most of whom had been at Hyde Park in September. We watched a short film about the stand-up action, including their “sending me off” to New York. And so, six months later, I reported, “Mission accomplished” and explained why it was important for the Church to be a voice at the Summit..... a religious voice and the voice of faith that sought to accompany and to engage the voices of statistics, and of demographic and scientific analyses in dialogue.

4. *The TRUTH of Faith and Reason in Action:* THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

In the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict XVI observed that «God’s word inspires men and women to build relationships based on rectitude and justice, and testifies to the great value in God’s eyes of every effort to create a more just and more liveable world. The Word of God itself unambiguously denounces injustices and promotes solidarity and equality. In the light of the Lord’s words, let us discern the ‘signs of the times’ present in history, and not flee from a commitment to those who suffer and the victims of forms of selfishness.

For this reason, the Synod Fathers wished to say a special word to all who take part in political and social life. The evangelization and the spread of God's word ought to inspire their activity in the world, as they work for the true common good in respecting and promoting the dignity of every person". Referring to the latter as "primarily the task of the lay faithful", the Pope recommended equipping them in the "school of the Gospel" and suitably forming them in the principles of the *Church's social teaching* »²⁵.

Similarly, the message of the Holy Father to the plenary assembly of *the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*, last November said: "In view of the fact that the *social question* is increasingly becoming complex, but interrelated in its varied spheres, it is particularly urgent to form the Catholic laity in the *social teaching of the Church*. Indeed, the immediate task of working for a just social order belongs to the lay faithful; and it is necessary to form a laity capable of dedicating itself to the *common good*, especially in the very complex area of politics. Here, however, Benedict XVI went on to identify the *social teaching of the church* as representing "the essential reference point for the planning and social action of the lay faithful, as well as for their spiritual life".²⁶

The reference to self-dedication to the "*Common good*", refers to one of the basic principles of **Catholic Social Doctrine**, the other principles being: *the dignity and rights of the human person, universal destination of the goods of the earth (with an expression of a preferential option for the poor), subsidiarity, participation and solidarity*.

It was first described as such in the social encyclical of Pope Leo XIII in 1891²⁷ 120 years ago this past May 15th; and in it the insights Scriptures (of theology), philosophy, economics, ecology and politics have been harnessed coherently to formulate a *social teaching* that places the human person (his total and integral development) at the centre of all world systems of thought and

²⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Es. ap. *Verbum Domini*, n. 100. Benedict XVI, *Message 3-XI-2010*, nn. 4-5.

²⁶ BENEDICT XVI, *Message 3-XI-2010*, §4-5

²⁷ Counting the letter of the *Sacred Congregation of the Council* to Mons. Liénart, Bishop of Lille, on 5 June 1929, two documents of Vatican Council II: "*Gaudium et Spes*" and "*Dignitatis Humanae*", the second half of the encyclical letter, "*Deus caritas est*", and the Instruction: *Dignitas Personae*, on certain bioethical questions, from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Dec. 8 2008), one may reckon with twenty two (22) official documents on the social teaching of the church (cfr. *Le Discours social de l'Église Catholique: De Léon XIII à Benoît XVI*, Bayard Montrouge 2009).

activity.

A true understanding of the Church's Social Doctrine starts with the faith experience of the ecclesial community itself. Responding to God's revelation of his love and truth in Jesus Christ, people are transformed by the power of the God's word and re-socialized by his love in the Holy Spirit. This new social reality, the ecclesial community, proclaims the love and truth of the Trinitarian life which surrounds it.²⁸ From this experience, people become subjects of love and of truth, called to become agents of a new freedom and a new way of thinking, instruments of grace and communion, spreading the Good News of God's love, weaving networks of love and of truth. This baptismal experience of life of the ecclesial community does not close in on itself, but interacts at every level with the world. It is in living in Jesus, the Supreme Truth and Good that the faithful discover a new and appropriate order of goods and an authentic scale of values.

Thus, the **Catholic Social Doctrine** emerges at the public crossroad where Christian life and conscience come into contact with the real world, to build a fuller expression of justice and charity into the structures of human life in common. The world, human society (*res socialis*), the context of the Church's social teaching, has changed over the years: from the misery of workers in the days after the industrial revolution and the emergence of Marxism (Pope Leo XIII: *Rerum Novarum*), the crisis of 1929 (Pope Pius XI: *Quadragesimo Anno*), decolonization and appearance of "third worldism" (Pope John XXIII: *Mater et Magistra*; *Pacem in Terris* and Pope Paul VI: *Populorum Progressio*; *Gaudium et Spes*), the fall of the wall of Berlin and political changes in Eastern Europe (Pope John Paul II: *Laborens exercens*; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*; *Centesimus annus*) to globalization, under-development, financial, economic, moral and anthropological crisis²⁹ of Pope Benedict XVI (*Caritas in veritate*). In these changing situations, the social encyclicals of the Popes have variously formulated the **Church's Social Doctrine** to apply Christian faith and the charity of Christ to the various contexts of human life. So, "the Church's *social teaching* (doctrine) illuminates with an

²⁸ *Caritas in veritate*, 54. "In the light of the revealed mystery of the Trinity, we understand that true openness does not mean loss of individual identity but profound interpenetration".

²⁹ Cfr. *ibid.* no.75.

unchanging light the new problems that are constantly emerging”.³⁰

Catholic Social Doctrine, then, is illumined by faith and inspired by the love of Christ. It is in friendly dialogue with all branches of knowledge; and it expresses the Church’s teaching ministry. It provides principles for reflection, criteria for judgement and avenues for concrete action with view:

- to promoting an integral and solidary humanism that will inspire a collective sense of responsibility,
- to fashioning a society reconciled in Justice and love;

for, man’s earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by truth and charity, contributes to the building of an earthly city of unity and peace, which is an anticipation and a prefiguration of the universal city of God.

The full truth of man and the manner of public management show that successes and failures in each area of public life have their origins in the human heart. To commit oneself to a more just functioning of society goes with committing oneself to a better Christian life. Therefore, let us not separate, much less oppose, the religious and social dimensions of life.

5. Conclusion

Once upon a time, in this country, to be British and to be Catholic were treated as contradictory and incompatible; in fact, to be catholic was to be criminal. Today is brighter, and you have given me a very sympathetic hearing. But if what I have said sounds antique or novel, this may be a measure of the secularization that is rapidly taking place in Britain and throughout Europe. The article about Tony Blair continues, “Enlightenment thought would have us believe that the irresistible progress of humanity were synonymous with the extinction of religions, of which we would have no more need.” Today it seems axiomatic, that public life has no space for morality, can make no spiritual demand upon anyone. Are we better for having the public space swept so clean? I think not! The enlightenment assumption is restrictive rather than liberating; and for giving

³⁰ Cfr. *ibid.* no.12; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no.3. Evolving new social contexts which require constant reflection are: Ecological disaster, Migrations, effects of war on civilians, Fundamentalism and politicization of religion, Breakdown of the family, and world economics.

such attentive consideration to these thoughts, I thank you very much, and look forward to the dialogue which I believe will ensure.

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