

Pope Calls on U.N. Leaders to Resist Culture of Death

by Edward Pentin Friday, May 09, 2014

Aware of the U.N.'s contrary positions on many life issues, Pope Francis today challenged 29 heads of U.N. agencies to resist the "throwaway culture" and the "culture of death" which, he said, "nowadays sadly risk becoming passively accepted."

It is one of the few times - if not the first - that Francis has used the term "culture of death" which was first coined by St. John Paul II in his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. John Paul defined the term as the "war of the powerful against the weak", characterized by a society that lacks solidarity, and fostered by "powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency." He included within this culture many current social evils such as procured abortion, modern slaveries such as pornography and drug addiction, disdain for the poor, and euthanasia.

In today's private audience at the Vatican with the United Nations Chief Executives Board and Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, the Pope said that "an awareness of the dignity of each of our brothers and sisters whose life is sacred and inviolable from conception to natural death must lead us to share with complete freedom the goods which God's providence has placed in our hands." As in his [speech](#) at the World Economic Forum in Davos earlier this year, the Holy Father also



underlined the "indispensable" cooperation of the private sector in working alongside state initiatives for the common good.

Quoting St. John Paul II's encyclicals *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, *Centesimus Annus*, and Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*, he stressed that "equitable economic and social progress can only be attained by joining scientific and technical abilities with an unflinching commitment to solidarity accompanied by a generous and disinterested spirit of gratuitousness at every level.

"A contribution to this equitable development will also be made both by international activity aimed at

the integral human development of all the world's peoples and by the legitimate redistribution of economic benefits by the State, as well as indispensable cooperation between the private sector and civil society," he added.

He closed by urging the UN leaders to "work together in promoting a true, worldwide ethical mobilization which, beyond all differences of religious or political

convictions, will spread and put into practice a shared ideal of fraternity and solidarity, especially with regard to the poorest and those most excluded."

Here below is his speech in full:

Mr Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you, Mr Secretary-General and the leading executive officers of the Agencies, Funds and Programmes of the United Nations and specialized Organizations, as you gather in Rome for the biannual meeting for strategic coordination of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board.

It is significant that today's meeting takes place shortly after the solemn canonization of my predecessors, Popes John XXIII and John Paul II. The new saints inspire us by their passionate concern for integral human development and for understanding between peoples. This concern was concretely expressed by the numerous visits of John Paul II to the Organizations headquartered in Rome and by his travels to New York, Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi and The Hague.

I thank you, Mr Secretary-General, for your cordial words of introduction. I thank all of you, who are primarily responsible for the international system, for the great efforts being made to ensure world peace, respect for human dignity, the protection of persons, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, and harmonious economic and social development.

The results of the Millennium Development Goals, especially in terms of education and the decrease in extreme poverty, confirm the value of the work of coordination carried out by this Chief



Executives Board. At the same time, it must be kept in mind that the world's peoples deserve and expect even greater results.

An essential principle of management is the refusal to be satisfied with current results and to press forward, in the conviction that those gains are only consolidated by working to achieve even more. In the case of global political and economic organization, much more needs to be achieved, since an important part of humanity does not share in the benefits of progress and is in fact relegated to the status of second-class citizens. Future Sustainable Development Goals must therefore be formulated and carried out with generosity and courage, so that they can have a real impact on the structural causes of poverty and hunger, attain more substantial results in protecting the environment, ensure dignified and productive labor for all, and provide appropriate protection for the family, which is an essential element in sustainable human and social development. Specifically, this involves challenging all forms of injustice and resisting the "economy of exclusion", the "throwaway culture" and the "culture of death" which nowadays sadly risk becoming passively accepted.

With this in mind, I would like to remind you, as representatives of the chief agencies of global cooperation, of an incident which took place two thousand years ago and is recounted in the Gospel of Saint Luke (19: 1-10). It is the encounter between Jesus Christ and the rich tax collector Zacchaeus, as a result of which Zacchaeus made a radical decision of sharing and justice, because his conscience had been awakened by the gaze of Jesus. This same spirit should be at the beginning and end of all political and economic activity. The gaze, often silent, of that part of the human family which is cast off, left behind, ought to awaken the conscience of political and economic agents and lead them to generous and courageous decisions with immediate results, like the decision of Zacchaeus. Does this spirit of solidarity and sharing guide all our thoughts and actions?

Today, in concrete terms, an awareness of the dignity of each of our brothers and sisters whose life is sacred and inviolable from conception to natural death must lead us to share with complete freedom the goods which God's providence has placed in our hands, material goods but also intellectual and spiritual ones, and to give back generously and lavishly whatever we may have earlier unjustly refused to others.

The account of Jesus and Zacchaeus teaches us that above and beyond economic and social systems and theories, there will always be a need to promote generous, effective and practical openness to the needs of others. Jesus does not ask Zacchaeus to change jobs nor does he condemn his financial activity; he simply inspires him to put everything, freely yet immediately and indisputably, at the service of others. Consequently, I do not hesitate to state, as did my predecessors (cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42-43; *Centesimus Annus*, 43; BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 6; 24-40), that equitable economic and social progress can only be attained by joining scientific and technical abilities with an unfailing commitment to solidarity accompanied by a generous and disinterested spirit of gratuitousness at every level. A contribution to this equitable development will also be made both by international activity aimed at the integral human development of all the world's peoples and by the legitimate redistribution of economic benefits by the State, as well as indispensable cooperation between the private sector and civil society.

Consequently, while encouraging you in your continuing efforts to coordinate the activity of the international agencies, which represents a service to all humanity, I urge you to work together in promoting a true, worldwide ethical mobilization which, beyond all differences of religious or political convictions, will spread and put into practice a shared ideal of fraternity and solidarity, especially with regard to the poorest and those most excluded.

Invoking divine guidance on the work of your Board, I also implore God's special blessing for you, Mr Secretary-General, for the Presidents, Directors and Secretaries General present among us, and for all the personnel of the United Nations and the other international Agencies and Bodies, and their respective families.