

Physical Economy, Peace: Vatican's Moral Issues

by Liliana Gorini

On Oct. 25, one week before the U.S. elections, Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, gave a press conference at the Holy See Press Office at the Vatican to present the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, a 500-page book published by the Libreria Editrice Vaticana, which had been commissioned by Pope John Paul II. As Cardinal Martino explained, "This document has been prepared—at the request of the Holy Father, to whom it is dedicated—by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which is fully responsible for its content. It is now made available to all—Catholics, other Christians, people of good will—who seek sure signs of truth in order to better promote the social good of persons and societies. This work began five years ago under the presidency of my venerated predecessor, Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan. An unavoidable delay in the work was caused by the sickness and death of Cardinal Van Thuan and by the subsequent change in presidency of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace." In the introduction to the book, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State of the Holy See, emphasizes, "The Holy Father, while wishing that the present document helps humanity in the continuous research of the Common Good, invokes the benediction of God on those who will stop to reflect on the teachings of such a publication."

What strikes one immediately upon reading the docu-

ment, is the strong contrast between the "moral issues" raised by the Pope and his Pontifical Council, and the so-called "moral issues," or rather single issues, such as gay marriages or abortion, raised by George Bush and his senior advisor and chief political strategist, Karl Rove, during the Presidential elections, in order to attract the vote of Catholics and other Christians.

The document, commissioned by Pope John Paul II, dedicates one of its main chapters to "promoting peace," stating clearly that any "pre-emptive war action, launched without any evidence that an aggression is upcoming, cannot but raise serious questions from the moral and juridical standpoint." It emphasizes that "economic development is the new name for peace," going back to two encyclical letters which are fundamental for the social doctrine of the Church, *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of the Peoples), issued by Pope Paul VI in 1967, and *Centesimus Annus*, issued by Pope John Paul II in 1991. The other "moral issue" raised by the Vatican document, and raised during the Presidential elections by former Democratic pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche, and by John Kerry, himself a Catholic, is that of "morality in economics" and the urgent need of a new economic and financial system, in order to punish financial speculation and to allow the development of the physical economy and of social welfare.

Pope John Paul II himself stated, in a speech to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in April 1997: "An economy based only on financial gain deprives itself from its own roots and from its original aim, which should be that of serving the real economy and should be, ultimately, the development of people and human communities. The economic picture becomes all the more dramatic if one considers the asymmetry characterizing the international financial system: innovative processes and the deregulation of financial markets tend in fact to develop only in some parts of the globe. This raises serious ethical questions, because the countries which are excluded from such processes, even if they are excluded from any benefit from such financial products, are not safe from the negative consequences of financial instability on their real economic systems, particularly if they are fragile and late in developing."

From this standpoint, the Vatican document urgently calls on "international economic and financial institutions to identify the most appropriate institutional solutions" necessary to change the present financial system and solve the question of "foreign debt" of poor countries, another "moral issue" raised by Pope John Paul II on a number of occasions, including the Jubilee Year 2000.

These moral issues were blatantly ignored by George Bush, Karl Rove, and their supporters in many U.S. churches, including a number of Catholic priests in Ohio who were ready to "excommunicate" Kerry for his position on abortion, but had no compassion for the millions of Africans starving

or dying of AIDS as a result of an immoral financial system and its International Monetary Fund conditionalities, no compassion whatsoever for the 50 million Americans without health care, or for elderly people deprived of the flu vaccine. One wonders whether Bush, who claims God voted for him, or some of the Catholic priests who invited their parish to vote for him, ever read any of the encyclical letters mentioned in the Vatican document as the basis for the Social Doctrine of the Church, starting with *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII (1892), *Quadragesimo Anno*, issued by Pope Pius XI 40 years after *Rerum Novarum*, in the midst of the economic depression of 1929, up to *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) by Pope John XXIII, and to the already mentioned encyclical letters *Populorum Progressio* by Pope Paul VI and *Centesimus Annus* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* by the present Pope. One wonders actually if they ever read the Gospel, and, as LaRouche said in a number of radio interviews after the election, “what God are they actually praying to, if any.”

As a former Italian Premier of the Catholic party in Italy told *EIR* ten days before the election, “The position of the Pope on this war is very clear, it is that of Mother Theresa of Calcutta, that war is wrong under any circumstance and you do not remedy a wrongdoing with a worse one. It is not surprising that when President Bush was received by the Pope in Rome, his National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, refused to come with him.”

One of the key aspects of the social doctrine of the Church is its invitation to intervene in defense of the Common Good, of peace, and of social strata hit by the economic crisis. A few years ago, Pope John Paul II summoned the heads of the three main Italian trade unions to the Vatican, to invite them to “fight for a new, more just economic order.” Since the beginning of the war in Iraq, he has repeated every Sunday, in St. Peter’s Square, his call to all heads of state to put an end to violence, and to launch an urgent initiative for peace in Iraq, and peace between Israel and Palestine.

The Pope and the Vatican have been also constantly intervening on the urgent moral issue of a new economic and financial system. At a conference on “moral orientation in credit and finance” organized in Milan on Nov. 24, 2003, by the Association for Development of the Study of Banking and the Market, Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, Archbishop of Milan, answered my question on whether Italy could play a role in pushing for a new financial and economic system, a New Bretton Woods, saying, “Not only Italy could do it, but it should do it.” One can only hope that true Christians and “people of good will,” as Cardinal Martino said in his press conference, reading the summary of the Social Doctrine of the Church, will learn what the true moral issues are facing the world, and the present U.S. Administration, and act accordingly, finally accepting the idea that this financial system and this war are truly immoral.

Documentation

Social Doctrine Of the Church

Below are excerpts from the newly released Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

The Economic Life

From Chapter Seven:

II. Morality and Economics

330. The social doctrine of the Church emphasizes the moral connotation of economics. . . .

332. The moral dimension of economics considers as inseparable aims, not as opposed and alternative aims, economic efficiency and the promotion of a development of humanity inspired by solidarity. Morality does not conflict with economics, nor is it neutral: If it is inspired by justice and solidarity, it constitutes a factor of social efficiency of economics itself . . . in order to fight, in the spirit of justice and charity, wherever they exist, those “structures of sin” (John Paul II: *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*), which generate and maintain poverty, underdevelopment and degradation. Such structures are built and consolidated on many concrete acts of human egoism.

IV: Economic institutions at the service of Man

349. The idea that one can assign to the market the supply of all categories of goods cannot be shared, since it is based on a narrow view of the person and of society. Faced with the concrete risk of “idolatry” of the market, the social doctrine of the Church emphasizes the market’s limit, which can easily be seen in its inability to satisfy important human needs, for which goods are needed “which, by their nature, are not, nor can they be merely considered commodities” (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*).

V: *Res Novae* in economics

a) Globalization: opportunities and risks

364. The social doctrine emphasized repeatedly the imbalances of an international trade system which, as a result of protectionist policies, discriminates against products coming from poor countries and hinders the growth of industrial activities and the transfer of technology to such countries. The continued deterioration in terms of exchange of raw materials and the deepening gap between rich and poor countries have induced the Teaching of the Church to keep in mind the importance of ethical criteria which should orient economic relations: to promote the Common Good and the universal distribution of wealth. . . . Otherwise, “the poor continue to remain all the time poor, while the rich become richer” (Pope Paul

VI: *Populorum Progressio*).

b) The international financial system

368. The development of financial markets, in which the volume of transactions is far superior to trade in real goods, risks to follow a self-serving logic, without any connection to the basis of the real economy.

369. An economy based only on financial gain detaches itself from its own roots and from its original aim, which should be that of serving the real economy and should be, ultimately, the development of people and human communities. The economic picture becomes all the more dramatic if one considers the asymmetry characterizing the international financial system: innovative processes and the deregulation of financial markets tend to develop only in some parts of the globe. This raises serious ethical questions, because the countries which are excluded from such processes, even if they are excluded from any benefit from such financial products, are not immune from the negative consequences of financial instability on their real economic systems, particularly if they are fragile and no far along in development (Pope John Paul II, speech at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, April 25th 1997).

371. The more the world economic and financial system reaches elevated levels of organization and functional complexity, the more it faces the priority task of regulating such processes, to direct them towards achieving the Common

Good of the human family. Concretely this implies the urgency that, in addition to nation states, the international community also assumes this delicate function, adopting suitable political and legal instruments. It is therefore indispensable that the international economic and financial institutions identify the most appropriate institutional solutions and work out the best strategies of action in order to achieve a change, since otherwise, if things were left to themselves, this would provoke dramatic results hitting in particular the weakest and most defenseless layers of the world population.

c) Foreign debt

450. The right to development must be kept in mind in dealing with the debt crisis of many poor countries. This crisis has many and complex causes, both international—flexible exchange rates, financial speculation, economic neocolonialism—and inside the indebted countries themselves—corruption, bad management of public money, and the distorted use of loans. The greatest suffering, provoked by structural questions but also by personal behaviors, affects the population of indebted and poor countries, who have no responsibility for these conditions. The international community cannot overlook such a situation: even if it states the principle that debts must be honored, it must find a way not to compromise “the fundamental right of peoples to subsistence and progress” (Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*).

Promoting Peace

From Chapter Eleven

III. The Failure of Peace: War

497. The Teaching of the Church condemns “the incredible nature of war” and demands that it be considered with a totally new approach: in fact “it is almost impossible to think that in the atomic era war can be used as an instrument of justice” (Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*). War is a “calamity” and it never represents the right way to solve problems arising among Nations. “It never was and it never will be,” because it generates more and more complex conflicts. When it explodes, war becomes a “useless massacre” and an “adventure with no return” which compromises the present and jeopardizes the future of humanity.

498. The search for alternative solutions to war in order to solve international conflicts today assumes a character of dramatic urgency, because of “the terrifying power of the means of destruction existing today.” It is therefore essential to look for the causes behind a war, first of all those connected to situations of injustice, poverty, and exploitation, which have to be removed in the first place. “This is why development is the new name for peace. As there is a collective responsibility to avoid war, there is also a collective responsibility to promote development” (Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*).

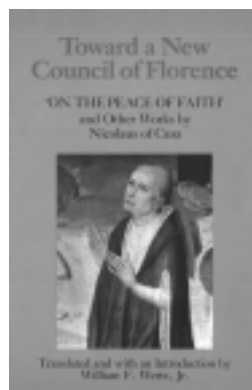
501. . . . As to pre-emptive war, launched without any evidence that an aggression is imminent, it cannot but raise serious questions from the moral and legal standpoint.

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