



A Church Seeking Justice

The Challenge of Pope Francis to the Church in Canada

*The Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace of
the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops*

■ Introduction

1. A few days after the conclave that saw him elected as Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis met with the thousands of journalists who had gathered in

Rome and told them the story of his choice of the name Francis. He related how he was seated next to his good friend Cardinal Claudio Hummes in the Sistine Chapel as the votes were being tallied, and when the votes



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"How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!"

– Pope Francis,
March 16, 2013

reached two thirds, Cardinal Hummes embraced him and said: "Don't forget the poor!" Pope Francis related: "Those words came to me: the poor, the poor. Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. Then I thought of all the wars, as the votes were still being counted, till the end. Francis is also the man of peace. That is how the name came into my heart: Francis of Assisi ... who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man ... How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!"¹

2. Pope Francis has more than lived up to Cardinal Hummes's word of advice. Not only has he not forgotten the poor, he has reminded the rest of us almost daily of God's undying concern for those trapped in poverty, prisoners, refugees, the unemployed, and for many others on the margins and peripheries of society. Our first Pope from the Global South, Pope Francis's way of applying Gospel teaching to daily living was forged in the cauldron of the slums in Buenos Aires. There he cultivated a pastoral approach to people characterized by listening and presence, simplicity and solidarity, proclaiming a Gospel of joy, and walking with "*el pueblo fiel de Dios*," the faithful people of God, with their needs. Now as Pope, he has inspired and challenged us with his personal example, and perhaps even wearied us a bit with his persistence in addressing – and asking that we address – issues of justice and peace. He has brought an immediacy and specificity to Catholic social teaching that has made it a strong mark of his pontificate thus far. Hence it has seemed important for the Justice and

¹ Audience with media representatives, March 16, 2013.

Peace Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to reflect on the challenge which Pope Francis is presenting to us, and in a particular way, to initiate a discussion on how his teaching in this area is challenging us here in Canada.

A Gospel Proclaiming Justice

3. Pope Francis understands the Church's social teaching – about those in poverty or afflicted by other forms of suffering, about economic injustice, and about war and peace – as rising directly out of the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus Christ. He consistently and strongly sets his reflections on justice and mercy within a framework of faithfulness to Christ.



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Jesus not only reached out to those in need throughout his ministry, he also identified himself in a direct and immediate way with those who were on the peripheries, who were vulnerable or in need. “Whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40; cf. Mt 25:31-46). Out of love, God in Christ makes

himself poor; the Incarnation and the cross are God's embrace of poverty in order to embrace us in our need. Pope Francis calls this turn to the poor in love God's “first mercy.” This, in turn, shapes what God asks of us, what it means for us to put on the mind of Christ. Outreach to the peripheries is a vital part of the proclamation of the Gospel. Furthermore, Pope Francis tells us that the poor, in their difficulties, “know the suffering Christ,” and he encourages us to find the suffering Christ in them. In addition to lending our voice to their causes and entering into relationship with them, we are also to learn from them, “to listen to them ... and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them” (*Evangelii Gaudium* [henceforth EG] 198).

4. This call for a direct, personal relationship with the poor, summons the Church both to acts of charity and to work for justice, which Pope Francis understands as bound together, and not to be separated. He challenges our practice of giving by saying that the world needs something more from us than a few sporadic acts of generosity. He calls us to promote the integral development of the poor, working for access to education, health care, employment with a just wage, and on another level, working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty, yet without overlooking the small daily acts of solidarity which meet real needs of those we encounter. Above all, he asks that we not water down the Gospel message, which is so clear and direct, simple and eloquent. By his words and his actions, Jesus summons us forcefully to humble and generous service, to justice and mercy towards the poor. Pope Francis asks us: “Why cloud something so clear?” (EG 194).

Not an Idea Or Ideology, But Real People with Urgent Needs



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5. The poor are not a general category, but real human beings with specific needs, and Pope Francis has been effective at making us see the human face of others in their suffering. When he ate with Palestinian refugees on his visit to the Holy Land, the press releases and news stories gave their names and told their stories. In Brazil, he went to those living in *favelas*, listened to their problems

and identified their struggles. He has drawn attention to the plight of the homeless in Rome by meeting and dining with them, and having showers installed for them at St. Peter's Square. To a group of students, he said: "Look, you can't speak of poverty without having experience with the poor," and went on to say: "You can't speak of poverty in the abstract: that doesn't exist. Poverty is the flesh of the poor Jesus, in that child who is hungry, in the one who is sick, in those unjust social structures."² In his World Youth Day message for 2014 he summoned us, saying, "Let us go out to meet them, look into their eyes and listen to them. The poor provide us with a concrete opportunity to encounter Christ himself, and to touch his suffering flesh."

6. By pointing to real people and specific situations, Pope Francis highlights the urgency of the present moment, and invites an energetic and emotional response to counter the "globalization of indifference" which has developed. "We are living in a time of crisis ... men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: it is the 'culture of waste'."³ If there are children in so many parts of the world who have nothing to eat, he asks, why is that not news, how can we allow people to be thrown aside as if they were trash? How can we stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? The urgency is not only at a personal level but at a structural one. Pope Francis speaks of social and economic trends and tendencies which, "unless effectively dealt with, are capable of setting off processes of dehumanization which would then be hard to reverse" (EG 51). He echoes Pope Saint John Paul II's assessment in

Laborem Exercens that "there is something wrong," deeply wrong, about our societal priorities, our economic and financial structures, our understanding of the human person.⁴ The moment has arrived, he says repeatedly, to face all of this, to name it well, and to do something about it.



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"In this world of globalization we have fallen into a globalization of indifference. We are accustomed to the suffering of others, it doesn't concern us."

– Pope Francis, homily at Lampedusa, July 8, 2013

² Address to students from Jesuit-run schools in Italy and Albania, June 7, 2013. Here Francis is quoting Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ, who was Father General of the Jesuits from 1965 to 1983.

³ General audience, June 5, 2013.

⁴ Address to the *Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice* Foundation, May 25, 2013.

The Voices of our Sisters

Between 1980 and 2012, 1,017 Indigenous women and girls in Canada were murdered and 164 were designated as missing and never found. We can no longer be indifferent to the issue of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. We need to open our hearts to the pain and suffering of Indigenous families and communities. Remembering together, mourning together and working together, we can make a difference. *How can we as parishes and dioceses stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples and all Canadians in the effort to put an end to violence against women and girls?*

7. This document will look at three aspects of Catholic social teaching to which Pope Francis is giving significant attention: the dignity of the human person and work; teachings on war and peace; and ethical reflections on economics and political responsibility. These three areas do not exhaust the long tradition of Catholic social teaching or Pope Francis's concern with those in need, but point us to some of the areas where he has been trying to get our attention, calling us to be a Church seeking justice.



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In terms of teaching, what Pope Francis is saying on these issues is not new; it grows out of the Gospel, and out of Catholic social teaching. Yet his sense of urgency and the priority he gives to these issues, along with the creative ways in which he applies our Church's teaching, speaks the Gospel message and tries to walk the talk, have captured the world's attention. Each of the three reflections will be accompanied by text boxes inviting critical questioning on our Canadian situation in light of the challenges posed by Pope Francis.

■ Human dignity and labour

8. Pope Francis's message about our world has not been one of doom and gloom. He has proclaimed a Gospel message that joyfully gives and calls us to life. But he has also focused repeatedly and at length on places of human suffering and injustice, places where human dignity has been wounded or is under threat. The Holy Father has pointed us to economic structures which deny or undermine the primacy of the human person (EG 55), and reminded us that "the majority of our contemporaries are barely living from day to day," faced with fear and desperation, violence and disease, making it "a struggle to live" (EG 52). He has decried political discourse which treats human dignity and the common good as a mere addendum while lacking strategies for integral development (EG 203). "It's necessary to put the dignity of the human person at the center of every perspective and every action.... Other interests, even if legitimate, are secondary."⁵

⁵ Homily in Campobasso, Italy, July 5, 2014.

Assisted Suicide

The recent decision of the Supreme Court of Canada to strike down our laws against assisted suicide presents an urgent and immediate challenge. The unanimous decision of the nine justices will entrench the idea that some lives are not worthy of living and will devalue the lives of our elders and persons who live with a disability, mental illness, depression or dementia. *How can we as a society prevent seriously ill patients from feeling pressured to accept death as a cost-saving measure? How can we protect the dignity and conscience rights of physicians and other health professionals who may be expected to participate in the intentional killing of their patients?*

9. From a Christian perspective, every human person carries an inherent dignity, not attached to particular human traits, but grounded in our creation in the image and likeness of God. Following his predecessors, Pope Francis has stressed that life is sacred and inviolable from conception to natural death, challenging moves towards the legalization of abortion and euthanasia in many countries, including Canada.⁶



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He has lamented how postmodern values have distorted family bonds, wounding the basic building blocks of society. And he has cried out against the “anthropological reductionism” of social and economic systems where the human person becomes a tool of the system, or where people are simply thrown away: “Children are thrown away ... the elderly are thrown away, because they are of no use. And now? A generation of young people is being thrown away ... they don’t work because there are no jobs. More waste. What will be the next thing thrown away? We must stop before it’s too late, please!”⁷

“Very quickly people entertain talk of eliminating the weakest to ‘solve the problems.’ We risk moving towards a philosophy of a perfect race, instead of welcoming the poorest and weakest among us, who transforms us ... Our society will really become human as we discover that the strong need the weak, just as the weak need the strong. We are all together working for the common good.”
– Jean Vanier, in accepting the Templeton Prize, March 11, 2015

10. The Gospel summons us to engagement whenever human dignity is threatened, binding the “wounds which disfigure the face of humanity.”⁸ It also equips us for that engagement; the Gospel’s “unified and complete sense of human life” offers the best remedy for our ills (EG 75). It not only moves us to action on the levels of both charity and justice, it also calls us to a vision which “considers the other ‘in a certain sense as one with ourselves,’” seeing their beauty, esteeming them as of great value.⁹ “This is what makes the authentic option for the poor differ from any other ideology, from any attempt to exploit the poor for one’s own personal or political interest” (EG 199).



Photo: © JUSTINTALUS / Stringer / Getty Images

⁶ Address to UN leaders, May 12, 2014.

⁷ Address to participants of the international seminar on *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican City, July 12, 2014.

⁸ Lenten message, 2014.

⁹ EG 199, citing Saint Thomas Aquinas, S. Th., II-II, q. 27, a. 2.

Restoring Solidarity to the Heart of Human Culture

Refugee Sponsorship in Canada

The United Nations reported that at the end of 2014, the number of people displaced by wars, conflict and persecution had reached 59.5 million – the highest level ever recorded.⁽¹⁾ Over 10,380 asylum seekers came to Canada in 2013 and made a refugee claim. Churches help settle many refugees in Canada, but worry about long processing times and government cuts to health coverage for some refugees. *Should Canada accept more refugees? Should your church community? What could speed up processing, better ensure health coverage and facilitate refugee integration in your community?*

(1) UNHCR, *Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase*, 18 June 2015. <http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>

11. Pope Francis describes the task at hand in terms of “restoring solidarity to the heart of human culture,” a task which requires a conversion in the way we see those in need.¹⁰ Confronting the “individualism of our postmodern and globalized era,” he summons us to break through our indifference.¹¹ The empathy called for in the face of suffering is not a vague emotion, but an alert and thoughtful sensitivity to people’s spiritual and material needs, moving us out of isolation and into solidarity. Pope Francis gave a lived lesson in this regard when he visited the Italian island of Lampedusa on July 8, 2013, and commemorated the many North African migrants and asylum seekers who died at sea trying to reach Europe. In his homily there, he asked: “Has any one of us wept because of this situation and others like it? Has any one of us grieved for the death of these brothers and sisters? Has any one of us wept for these persons who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who were looking for a means of supporting their families?” He spoke there, as on other occasions, about the globalization of indifference, and how our own humanity and that of others requires that we relearn how to mourn, to suffer with others.

The call to solidarity is a summons to our parishes and communities to “really be places of hospitality, listening and communion” for those in need, to be places of healing which strengthen the bonds of humanity.¹² Solidarity “is not an additional attitude, it is not a form of social alms-giving but, rather, a social value,” one essential for a civil society.¹³



Photo: © L'Osservatore Romano

¹⁰ Message for the 29th World Youth Day, January 21, 2014.

¹¹ EG 67.

¹² Address to the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, May 24, 2013.

¹³ Address to the *Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice* Foundation, May 25, 2013.

The Nobility of Human Labour and the Common Good

Temporary Foreign Workers in Canada

Over 33,000 companies and agencies have applied to the federal temporary foreign worker program in Canada, causing the program to triple to 338,189 workers in the last decade. Temporary foreign workers do not just work on farms or in fast-food restaurants: they work for the country's chartered banks, biggest telecom firms and even government departments. *What number of temporary foreign workers should Canada accept? Are there good reasons why temporary foreign workers should not receive full provincial health coverage?*

12. In continuity with Catholic social teaching, Pope Francis draws a close connection between human dignity, the nobility of labour, its relation to the common good, and the crises which inevitably result when labour is dehumanizing or absent altogether. God created human beings in his own image and likeness, to be stewards of his handiwork, responsible for the earth's cultivation and protection. "Human labour is part of that creation and continues God's creative work. This truth leads us to consider work as both a gift and a duty."¹⁴ Addressing steelworkers, the Holy Father affirmed that "employment is necessary for society, for families and for individuals.... Its primary value is the good of the human person, as it allows the individual to be fully realised as such, with his or her attitudes and intellectual, creative and manual capacities." Labour should not be reduced to the economic objective of profit, to a commodity.¹⁵ To a gathering including Italian farmers, he noted that farming involves "engaging in dialogue, a fruitful and creative dialogue ... with the land that [a farmer] renders productive, fruitful for all of us."¹⁶ Healthy labour fosters human dignity and works respectfully and creatively with the natural world. Labour is also intended to provide an opportunity for people to actively participate in building up the common good for the human family (EG 192). Speaking of business as having the potential to be a noble vocation, Pope Francis notes that it can serve the common good "by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all" (EG 203).



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¹⁴ Message to the 103rd Session of International Labour Conference, May 29, 2014.

¹⁵ Address to Italian Steelworkers, March 20, 2014.

¹⁶ Address to a gathering of farmers in Campobasso, Italy, July 5, 2014.

Income and Salary Disparities in Canada

The top 10% of Canadians control 47.9% of the wealth while the bottom 30% of Canadians account for only 0.8% of all wealth. By 11:41 a.m. on January 2, 2015, the top 100 Canadian CEOs had each made as much as the average Canadian does in a year. This means their salaries are 195 times more than the average worker.

What level of inequality is acceptable in Canadian society? How do these monetary values reflect the way we value human lives and labour?

the right to labour unions, social security and retirement coverage;¹⁹ and the need to ensure proper working conditions.²⁰ He has expressed appreciation for discussion and cooperation between governments, labourers and employers at the service of social and economic development.

Unemployment and Slave Labour

Youth and Indigenous Unemployment in Canada

Statistics Canada said our country's unemployment rate was 6.8% in March 2015. But the unemployment rate for youth between the ages of 15 and 24 was nearly double that, at 13.3%.⁽²⁾ Employment among Indigenous people has been consistently lower than employment for the rest of Canadians, and unemployment for Indigenous youth aged 20 to 24 was over twice the national average in 2011. *What is the cost to our society of having a significant portion of the population without employment opportunities, especially young people? What current and historical barriers exist to employment for Indigenous Canadians?*

(2) <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/150313/dq150313a-eng.htm>

13. Again working from Catholic social teaching, Pope Francis has noted some of the urgent challenges and needs of our day. Addressing an international labour conference, he has called for "a more determined implementation of international labour standards; planning for a focused development on the human person as its central actor and primary beneficiary; a re-evaluation of the responsibilities of international corporations in the countries where they operate, including the areas of profit and investment management"; and the defining of future sustainable development goals which would "have a real impact on the structural causes of poverty and hunger, attain more substantial results in protecting the environment, ensure decent work for all, and provide appropriate protection for the family."¹⁷ In other contexts, he has spoken of the need to address the international imbalance in remuneration for labour, leaving many living on less than two dollars a day;¹⁸



Image: Rodrigo de Matos / www.rodrigoartoon.com

14. Over and over again, Pope Francis has spoken about great damage caused by unemployment, both to a society and to the unemployed and their families. Work is indispensable to our human development and to family life; it allows us to plan our future, to establish a family, to educate our children. "If there is no work, [human] dignity is wounded! Indeed, the unemployed and underemployed risk being relegated to the margins of society, becoming victims of social exclusion."²¹ Unemployment

¹⁷ Message to the 103rd Session of International Labour Conference, May 29, 2014.

¹⁸ Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, October 2, 2014.

¹⁹ Address to Popular Movements, October 29, 2014.

²⁰ Address to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, France, November 25, 2014.

²¹ Address to Italian Steelworkers, March 20, 2014; cf. General audience, September 3, 2014.

takes away the opportunity to bring bread home to the table, takes away an essential element in building strong families where people can live and grow.²² Pope Francis has commented on how unemployment “is spreading like an oil slick in vast areas of the west and is alarmingly widening the boundaries of poverty,” and has particularly lamented the number of young people who find themselves without work.²³ “It is outrageous that some countries have a youth unemployment rate of more than 50%, with tens of millions of young Europeans out of work.”²⁴ The Holy Father has repeatedly traced high levels of unemployment to an economic system that places profits above the human person, resulting in “a disposable culture that considers the human being in himself as a consumer good, which can be used and then discarded.”²⁵



Photo: © Wwphoto | Dreamstime.com

15. Far more horrific than unemployment is slave labour and human trafficking. Pope Francis has joined together with leaders of other Christian communities and religions in establishing the Global Freedom Network, with the aim of eradicating modern slavery by 2020. At the signing of a joint declaration to that end on December 2, 2014, he stated: “Inspired by our confessions of faith, we are gathered here today for an historical initiative and to take concrete action:



Photo: © L'Osservatore Romano

to declare that we will work together to eradicate the terrible scourge of modern slavery in all its forms. The physical, economic, sexual and psychological exploitation of men, women and children that is currently inflicted on tens of millions of people constitutes a form of dehumanisation and humiliation.”

Here, as elsewhere, Pope Francis has not only named the problems, he has also passionately cried out, “This cannot continue!” and has summoned people to work together, each doing their part, to create societies, cultures and economic structures where the dignity of human life is respected and the common good is sought through solidarity, creativity and compassion.

²² Address to participants in the congress “In Precariousness, Hope,” October 25, 2014; Address to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, France, November 25, 2014.

²³ Address to the *Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice* Foundation, May 25, 2013.

²⁴ Interview with Barcelona newspaper *La Vanguardia*, June 12, 2014; English translation, *Zenit*, June 13, 2014; cf. Message to participants in the congress “In Precariousness, Hope,” October 25, 2014.

²⁵ Address to Popular Movements, October 29, 2014; cf. Address to Italian Steelworkers, March 20, 2014; interview with *La Vanguardia*, June 12, 2014.

■ War, Peace and Violence

16. Jesus told his disciples, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mt 5:9). And when the Risen Lord appeared to his disciples, he most often greeted them with the words “Peace be with you” (Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19).



Photo: © L'Osservatore Romano

“May the God of peace create in all an authentic desire for dialogue and reconciliation. Violence is conquered with peace! Let us pray in silence, asking for peace; everyone, in silence.... Mary Queen of peace, pray for us!”

– Pope Francis, Angelus, July 20, 2014

The Church is called by Christ to seek peace, and the Petrine office has a long tradition of addressing situations of violence and conflict, both calling and praying for peace. Pope Francis has continued and deepened that tradition as with great regularity he has addressed particular conflicts, general trends towards militarization, and the entire world’s need and yearning for peace. His message, inspired

by St. Francis of Assisi and the long tradition of peacemaking in the Church, has been grounded in the transformative power of the cross of Christ, and in the

way that God brings forth and summons us to peace. For instance, at a prayer service for an end to violence in Syria, he exclaimed: “How I wish that all men and women of good will would look to the Cross if only for a moment! There, we can see God’s reply: violence is not answered with violence, death is not answered with the language of death. In the silence of the Cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue and peace is spoken.”²⁶

In an Easter address, following a litany of the many troubled areas in the world, he invited all gathered to “ask the risen Jesus, who turns death into life, to change hatred into love, vengeance into forgiveness, war into peace.”²⁷

“Peace is built day by day.... It is not an industrial product, it is an artisanal product. It is crafted every day with our work, with our life, with our closeness.”

– Pope Francis speaking to children, May 12, 2015.

17. Pope Francis has challenged the way we look at war and respond to it. Our newspapers tell us daily about wars, and “the number of its victims is just part of our daily accounts.”²⁸ Instead

of becoming immunized from the misery, hunger, illness and death which accompany war, we must attend to the pain if we want to build a society and world which are sane.



Photo: © UN Photo. All rights reserved.

Pope Paul VI addressed the UN on October 4, 1965, saying, “War never again, never again war!”

²⁶ Vigil of Prayer for Peace in Syria, St. Peter’s Square, September 7, 2013.

²⁷ Easter *Urbi et Orbi* Message, March 31, 2013.

²⁸ Homily, February 25, 2014.

Canada's Arms Sales

Ottawa has announced a \$15 billion sale of armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia. An Ontario-based manufacturer promised 3,000 jobs over the 14 years of the contract. Even though federal law requires an assessment of a buyer regime's human rights practices, one was not done. Project Ploughshares, an agency of the Canadian Council of Churches, writes, "The Saudi government's abysmal human rights record is well documented. In directing a crown corporation to actively seek out the contracts, the Canadian government has ignored the high risk that Canadian vehicles will become tools of repression." *Should Canada sell arms or military equipment to countries that ignore basic human rights? What restrictions should be placed on Canadian companies producing armaments?*

love."³¹ We cannot allow the word 'peace' to become an empty word. It asks something of us, requires something of us. "Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare. It calls for the courage to say yes to encounter and no to conflict: yes to dialogue and no to violence: yes to negotiations and no to hostilities: yes to respect for agreements and no to acts of provocation: yes to sincerity and no to duplicity. All of this takes courage, it takes strength and tenacity."³²

18. There is a deep dishonesty in much of our political discourse about war and peace, when it is accompanied by support of the industries which make our wars so

Canada and Peacemaking

Canada has an honourable record as a peacemaker. Since 1956 over 125,000 troops have served on peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the United Nations.⁽³⁾ In recent years, however, and despite the great need for peacemaking in troubled areas of the world, Canada's contribution to international peacemaking and peacekeeping has been greatly reduced. At present, only 132 Canadians are serving on peacekeeping missions.⁽⁴⁾ This contrasts sharply with an increasing and expensive Canadian military involvement in conflicts in Afghanistan and the Middle East. *What role ought Canada to play in ensuring that the world is a safe and peaceful place for future generations?*

(3) http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/prmny-mponu/canada_un-canada_onu/positions-orientations/peace-paix/peace-operations-paix.aspx?lang=eng

(4) <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/contributors.shtml>

"War is a scandal to be mourned every day."²⁹ "War always marks the failure of peace, it is always a defeat for humanity. Let the words of Pope Paul VI resound again: 'No more one against the other, no more, never! ... war never again, never again war!'"³⁰

In the Christian understanding, peace is not simply the absence of war or violence: "peace is at once a gift of God and the fruit of free and reasonable human acts aimed at pursuing the common good in truth and

deadly. "Everyone talks about peace, everyone claims to want it, but unfortunately the proliferation of weapons leads in the opposite direction. The arms trade has the effect of complicating and distancing us from a solution to conflicts." It is an "absurd contradiction to speak about peace, to negotiate peace and at the same time to promote and permit the arms trade."³³ Pope Francis has invited us to contrast the image of "the great dining rooms, of the parties held by those who control the arms industry ... the good life led by the masters of the arms trade" with the image of "a sick, starving child in a refugee camp."³⁴ Identifying the arms trade as "one of the greatest curses on the human race," he has strongly condemned chemical weapons, spoken of the enormous threat posed by nuclear weapons, and

²⁹ Vigil of Prayer for Peace, September 2, 2013.

³⁰ Homily, February 25, 2014, citing Pope Paul VI, October 4, 1965, in his speech before the UN in New York City.

³¹ Address to the Council of Europe, November 25, 2014.

³² Address to the Presidents of Israel and Palestine, June 9, 2014.

³³ Address to New Ambassadors, Vatican City, May 15, 2014.

³⁴ Homily, February 25, 2014.

decried the priorities which lead to massive spending on armaments while cutting back on programs which would address poverty.³⁵ Addressing new ambassadors to the Holy See, he encouraged that we “unite our voices in expressing hope that the international community may make new, concerted and courageous efforts against the proliferation of weapons and to promote their reduction.”³⁶

19. Expanding on the relationship between poverty, inequality and violence, Pope Francis has pushed for a recognition of the root causes of social and political instability: “Today in many places we hear a call for greater security. But until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence. The poor, and the poorest populations, are accused of violence, yet without equal opportunities the different forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile terrain for growth and eventually explode” (EG 59). When societies don’t tend to those on the margins, when a socioeconomic system is intrinsically unjust, trouble will follow. And when this happens on an international level, it can lead to war. “Inequality eventually engenders a violence which recourse to arms cannot and never will be able to resolve” (EG 60).



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Pope Pius XII

20. Genuine reconciliation and peacemaking is costly, but has the possibility of building a sustainable and human future. Quoting Pope Pius XII at the onset of the Second World War, that “Nothing is lost with peace; everything can be lost with war,” Pope Francis called for a costly commitment to building reconciliation and peace.³⁷ “What is required is a collective commitment on the part of all, based on mutual trust, which can pave the way to lasting peace, and enable resources to be directed, not to weaponry, but to the noble battles worthy of man: the fight against hunger and sickness, the promotion of sustainable development and the protection of creation, and the relief of the many forms of poverty and marginalization of which there is no shortage in the world today.”³⁸

21. Repeatedly, Pope Francis has put forward a summons to address problems by encounter and dialogue. Addressing political, diplomatic, religious, academic and business leaders in Brazil, he noted that when leaders in various fields ask him for advice, his response is always the same: “Dialogue, dialogue, dialogue!”³⁹



Photo: © L'Observatore Romano

³⁵ Address to the Council of Europe, November 25, 2014. Cf. Angelus Address, September 1, 2013; Message to Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, December 9, 2014.

³⁶ Address to New Ambassadors to the Holy See, May 15, 2014.

³⁷ Angelus Address, July 19, 2013, quoting Pope Pius XII’s Radio Message of August 24, 1939.

³⁸ Address to Turkish Authorities, Vatican City, November 28, 2014; cf. letter to Vladimir Putin on the Occasion of the G20 Summit, September 4, 2013.

³⁹ Meeting with Brazil’s Leaders of Society, Rio de Janeiro, July 27, 2013.

Canadian Mining Companies Abroad

With nearly 75 per cent of the world's mining and exploration companies listed on Canadian stock exchanges, Canada has a central role in this global industry. When operating in Canada, these companies must respect high environmental and labour standards, but this is not always the case when they are operating abroad. In the poorest countries in the Global South, communities, church leaders and civil society organizations have been documenting how the land, water, health and security of their communities have been damaged since the arrival of some Canadian mining companies. On July 17, 2015, addressing the conference "United with God, We Hear a Cry," on the effects of mining internationally, Pope Francis noted: "The entire mining sector is undoubtedly required to effect a radical paradigm change to improve the situation in many countries." *How can we ensure that Canadian mining companies apply the same high standards in their international operations as they do here in Canada? How can we ensure that the voices of affected communities are heard here in Canada and that their call for justice be answered?*

Inequality and Solidarity

Recent projections based on research data from Credit Suisse and *Forbes* magazine suggest that the combined wealth of the planet's richest 1% will overtake that of the other 99% of people in 2016 unless the current trend of rising inequality is checked.⁽⁵⁾ One in 9 people in the world today do not have enough to eat, and more than a billion people live on less than \$1.25 a day. *What is our responsibility as Canadians in addressing this inequality? Should Canada meet its promise to spend 0.7% of our gross national income on international aid?⁽⁶⁾ (The 2015 federal budget promised to spend only 0.24%.)*

(5) For further studies of global wealth distribution and inequality, see <http://inequality.org/global-inequality>.

(6) In 1970, Canada supported resolution 2626 of the UN General Assembly to "progressively increase its official development assistance to the developing countries and . . . exert its best efforts to reach a minimum net amount of 0.7 percent of its gross national product" (par. 43).

Addressing a recent regional conflict, and in a more general sense the many areas of conflict in the world today, Pope Francis made this plea: "Never has the use of violence brought peace in its wake. War begets war, violence begets violence. With all my strength, I ask each party in this conflict to listen to the voice of their own conscience, not to close themselves in solely on their own interests, but rather to look at each other as brothers and decisively and courageously to follow the path of encounter and negotiation, and so overcome blind conflict."⁴⁰ In that same spirit, he invited Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli President Shimon Peres to meet at the Vatican, joined also by Patriarch Bartholomew, the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople, to pray together for peace in the Middle East.

Economics of exclusion and isolation/poverty

22. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis reminds us that "economy, as the very word indicates, should be the art of achieving a fitting management of our common home, which is the world as a whole" (EG 206). Decisions made in one locale have impacts elsewhere; all nations share responsibility for addressing major global challenges.

The Human Cost of Economic Assumptions

23. In continuity with Catholic social teaching, Pope Francis has challenged dominant economic assumptions, especially in the West, introducing Gospel values into economic discourse. While competition and free markets are celebrated in our economic system, "the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest" result in many



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⁴⁰ Angelus Address, Sept. 1, 2013.

being “excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape” (EG 53). It is assumed that economic growth “will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world,” but this unquestioned assumption reflects a “crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system” (EG 54). The worship of money, a “dictatorship of an economy lacking a truly human purpose,” reduces people to their role as consumers, perpetrates exclusion and denies the primacy of the human person (EG 55). Whatever “stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market” (EG 56).

24. The economics of exclusion, isolation and poverty create a “throw-away culture” that “does so much harm to our world. Children are discarded, young people are discarded because they do not have work, and the elderly are discarded with the pretext to maintain a ‘balanced’ economic system, at the center of which is money, not the human person. We are all called to oppose this poisonous throw-away culture!” Christians, together with all people of good will, “are called to build with patience a different society, more hospitable, more human, more inclusive, which has no need to discard one who is weak in body and in mind, but a society that measures its ‘pace’ precisely on these persons.”⁴¹

Human Dignity and Justice as Priorities

25. Pope Francis’s observations on human dignity and justice reflects the Church’s traditional emphasis on a “preferential option for the poor” and its recognition of the dignity of human work in God’s plan for creation. All economic policies and systems should be shaped by the inherent dignity of each person, created in the image of God, and the pursuit of the common good; this is not simply a question of economics but also of ethics.⁴² Justice, fairness and respect

Poverty

Canada is a wealthy country, yet has an ever-widening gap between rich and poor. 4.8 million Canadians live in poverty, including 1 million children. In 1989, all parliamentarians committed to ending child poverty in Canada. Today, 1 in 7 children lives this reality, with 4 in 10 Indigenous children living in poverty. Current levels of poverty cost us billions of dollars in terms of increased health and social services costs and severely damage the fabric of our society as a whole. *Why does a wealthy country like Canada not dedicate more of its resources to reducing poverty? Provinces like Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador have adopted poverty reduction plans; should we not have a national poverty reduction strategy?*



Photo: © Liam Sharp / First Nations Child and Family Society of Canada

⁴¹ Address at Meeting with Elderly, Vatican City, September 28, 2014; cf. Address to the seminar “The Global Common Good: Towards a More Inclusive Economy,” Vatican City, June 12, 2014.

⁴² Address to Popular Movements, October 29, 2014; EG 203.

for every human being demand that we “find ways by which all may benefit from the fruits of the earth.”⁴³ A fundamental principle of the Church’s social teaching is the “universal destination of all goods.” All should have “fair access to those essential and primary goods which every person needs and to which he and she has a right.”⁴⁴ While some successes have been achieved in reducing poverty, “the majority of the men and women of our time still continue to experience daily insecurity, often with dramatic consequences,”⁴⁵ while the chasm between the wealthy and those without resources continues to grow. Unbridled consumerism and inordinate consumption, combined with inequality, “proves doubly damaging to the social fabric” (EG 60).

The Ethical Economy and the Common Good

26. Financial reform based on ethical considerations invites a “generous solidarity,” where money serves, not rules, and where those with abundant resources intentionally “help, protect and serve the poor” (EG 58). Pope Francis speaks of “a non-ideological ethics” that could bring about “a more humane social order” (EG 57), where the dignity of each person and the promotion of the common good would shape all economic decision-making (EG 203). Education, access to health care and employment for all would be priorities in such an ethical economy (EG 192). Addressing United Nations leaders, the Pope noted the urgent need



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for development goals to 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 labour for all, and provide appropriate protection for the family which is an essential element in sustainable human and social development.”⁴⁶ He urged the United Nations to work with others “in promoting a true, worldwide ethical mobilisation 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.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 2014.

⁴⁴ Message to the World Economic Forum at Davos, January 17, 2014.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Address to the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, May 9, 2014.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

A New Political Economy, a New Cooperation

27. Referring to Benedict XVI's Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Francis reminds us that "precisely because it is human, all human activity, including economic activity, must be ethically structured and governed."⁴⁸ What is needed is a new economic and political mindset, one suggested by Catholic social teaching and its attention to social-economic paradigms that would promote and enhance human dignity.

Poverty and the Environment

Addressing climate change in 2013, Pope Francis noted: "The time for seeking solutions is running out. We can find suitable solutions only if we act together and in agreement. There exists, however, a clear, definitive, and unpostponable ethical imperative to act." In his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, on the environment, he noted that developed countries (like Canada) have the greatest responsibility for global environmental devastation and climate change, while the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world are the ones who are suffering most from the effects of climate change. They are also the least responsible for carbon emissions. *As people of faith, how will we lower our greenhouse gas emissions here in Canada? How can we effect change and make a difference, as individuals, in families and communities, and in government policy?*



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We need to address the structural causes of inequality with "decisions, programmes, mechanisms and processes

specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality" (EG 204; cf. 202-205). Impact investing is one form of investment that "can benefit local communities and the environment, as well as providing a reasonable return."⁴⁹ Investments of this type are intended to have positive social repercussions on local communities, such as job creation, access to energy, training and increased agricultural productivity.

The "logic underlying these innovative forms of intervention is one which acknowledges the ultimate connection between profit and solidarity." Meanwhile, it is "increasingly intolerable that financial markets are shaping the destiny of peoples rather than serving their needs, or that the few derive immense wealth from financial speculation while the many are deeply burdened by the consequences."⁵⁰ Likewise, "a system of commercial relations and ownership" which allows affluent countries to better their quality of life by using the natural resources of poorer countries while the basic needs of citizens of the latter go unaddressed is "structurally perverse."⁵¹ We must find a way to "serve the common good with love and with preference for the most poor and vulnerable of our brothers and sisters."⁵²

Economic Success?

The usual norms applied to determine economic success in Canada fail to capture the reality of day-to-day life for many. This results in the odd situation whereby the economy is apparently doing well but many people are not. Our faith tells us we are judged on how we treat those most in need. *Are we willing to do what is necessary to ensure that Canadians living in poverty, Indigenous people and the most vulnerable among us have the same access to education, health and social services as other Canadians?*

structurally perverse."⁵¹ We must find a way to "serve the common good with love and with preference for the most poor and vulnerable of our brothers and sisters."⁵²

⁴⁸ Address to the *Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice* Foundation, May 25, 2013.

⁴⁹ Address to the congress "Impact Investing for the Poor," Vatican City, June 16, 2014.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Laudato Si'* 52. Cf. also *Laudato Si'* 95.

⁵² Address to the congress "Impact Investing for the Poor," Vatican City, June 16, 2014.

28. Pope Francis has stressed the urgency of economic reform in our day, indicating that it is the work of us all. He asks God for “more politicians capable of sincere and effective dialogue aimed at healing the deepest roots – and not simply the appearances – of the evils in our world” (EG 205). The state has a vital role in confronting unjust social structures, promoting an ethical vision of our common life, and fostering public discourse on the common good. The Church too, particularly the laity, has a role in this great task, working ecumenically and with other groups serving the common good wherever possible.⁵³

Recovering a Vision

In contemporary Canada, “the common good” has all but disappeared from the political lexicon. There is little considered debate of major public policy challenges, including health care, the environment, foreign relations and youth unemployment. This is in direct contrast to Pope Francis’s plea for political leaders to “broaden their horizons” to attend to the well-being of all citizens, and not to treat issues of poverty or the environment as an afterthought while prioritizing short-term economic gain. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov 29.18). Among the most obvious signs of political malaise in Canada is the low voter turnout for recent federal elections, particularly among younger eligible voters. In the 2011 election, only 38.8% of those 18 to 24 years of age voted, and of those in the 25 to 34 age range, only 45% voted. *What can be done to inspire the involvement of younger Canadians and to call forth their energy and commitment to make this nation and our world a better place?*

To all, he asks: “How long will we continue to defend systems of production and consumption which exclude most of the world’s population even from the crumbs which fall from the tables of the rich?”⁵⁴ The time has come, the moment has arrived, for a new way of living together on this earth.

29. Working for the common good extends beyond communities and national borders. In his message for World Food Day in 2014, Pope Francis notes that to defeat hunger, we need a new paradigm for development policies, a rethinking of our international laws regarding production and trade of agricultural products; we need “a change in the way of understanding work, economic objectives and activity, food production and the protection of the environment”; and we need “a new kind of cooperation” involving states, international institutions, organizations of civil society, and communities of believers if we are to build a genuine future of peace.



Photo: © Brian Flahmore | Dreamstime.com

⁵³ Address on Ministry in Big Cities, Vatican City, November 29, 2014.

⁵⁴ Message for World Food Day, October 16, 2014.

■ Conclusion

30. When the eternal Word of God came to dwell on this earth and walk among us, he brought Good News, the joy that comes with God's presence and faithfulness. It is a worthwhile exercise thinking about what it must have been like for Jesus' first hearers some two thousand years ago, as he spoke of God's mercy, God's justice and a new way of living. Those who listened to the Sermon on the Mount were probably moved at the depths of their being, but they also had much to ponder when they went home in the evening. When the Lord shared the parable of the last judgment (Mt 25.31-46), with the King saying to some, "When I was hungry you gave me food," but to others, "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me," his hearers were probably drawn into a deep self-examination. Listening to Jesus and being drawn into his paschal mystery is, for us, life and salvation. But the Lord reminds his hearers then and now that if we are to follow him, we need to change our lives, our way of being in the world. This is the unchanging call of the Gospel.

31. Catholic social teaching rises out of a passionate engagement with the world around us, guided by the teaching and example of Jesus, and the Kingdom he came to proclaim. That teaching is not only in the treasury of encyclicals of the past 125 years, but also in the preaching and life of the Church throughout its history. When in 4th-century Constantinople St. John Chrysostom told his hearers not to "adorn the church and ignore your afflicted brother, for he is the most precious temple of all," he was laying the foundations of Catholic social teaching; likewise, in 13th-century Assisi when St. Francis kissed the leper and sowed seeds of peace; and in 18th-century Montreal, when Marguerite d'Youville gathered together a group of women to serve the needs of the poor in their midst. Catholic Social Teaching was being proclaimed and lived by drawing attention to those in need and by allowing the Gospel message to transform the way we live and act as a society.



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32. Pope Francis, like his predecessors, is placing the joyful and transforming message of the Gospel before us, and unfolding how the Gospel shows us a way forward, where we as individuals and communities can face the challenges of the day in a way which is deeply human and filled with hope.



- In a world where human beings are often tossed aside, discarded, pushed to the margins, he has spoken with passion and a sense of urgency about the beauty and dignity of the human person, emphasizing that true humanity is found when we build direct and personal relationships with our brothers and sisters in greatest need, learning to walk together in solidarity and friendship.
- Faced with problems on a global scale which threaten to overwhelm us, the Holy Father has summoned us to challenge apathy with empathy, global indifference with a culture of encounter, complacency with an intelligent commitment to justice and the common good.
- Witnessing the short-term horrors and long-term devastation of war, he has reminded us that while violence begets violence, it is listening and dialogue, encounter and forgiveness that open a way towards reconciliation, living together in a future with peace.
- Reading the signs of the times, Pope Francis has been tireless in saying there is something deeply wrong with economic structures and market principles which leave billions of people living in poverty, calling each and all of us to creatively imagine a different way of structuring our common life, such that the human person, our common well-being, and care for the world in which we live have primacy of place in our economic and political decisions.

33. Canada is a great nation, in many respects among the most blessed on the planet. Still, as we listen to the words of Pope Francis, echoing the words of the Gospel and the long tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, we hear a direct and profound challenge. In the text boxes which form an important part of this document, we have sought to make connections between the Holy Father's teaching and some of the justice issues needing to be addressed in our own cities and nation. The well-being (or otherwise) of those on the peripheries of our communities, those who do not share in the abundance and blessing of our society, is an integral sign and indicator of our health as a nation. Public discourse is urgently needed on how we can build a more just, caring and thoughtful society in which all races and cultures can live in peace and harmony, a compassionate and generous society that is commensurate with the munificence our creator has shown Canada. Furthermore, the Gospel summons us to concerns and needs beyond those of our own nation. Those of other nations that are trapped in war or poverty or injustice are our sisters and brothers too. The Gospel, and our common humanity, call us to look beyond our own borders, with a broad vision, and to put ourselves at the service of a healthier and more just world.

34. The text boxes in this document are not exhaustive, and the questions they raise are not the only ones needing to be asked. As members of the Canadian Bishops' Justice and Peace Commission, we invite you to ponder these questions, to raise your own questions as well, and to seek out places where they can be discussed. We invite you to listen to the challenging voice of Pope Francis and to make connections between that teaching and the world around you in the particulars of your lives, your places of work, your parishes and communities, with eyes especially attentive to those in greatest need. Keep in mind that the Gospel calls us to charity and to justice, to attend to the needs of persons near us, and to seek out ways to contribute to the larger structural and societal issues needing to be addressed. You cannot help every person in need, nor address every injustice, but you can foster within yourself a Gospel vision for the world, a world where "mercy and faithfulness have met, justice and peace have embraced" (Ps. 85.10), and put yourself at the service of that broader vision. It is not too late to do so, but Pope Francis implores us that it is urgent, that Jesus is summoning us to it, and that the Holy Spirit will accompany us each step of the way.

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