

LET THE MUSIC OF THE GOSPEL RESOUND IN WORLDWIDE SOLIDARITY

SECAM-CCEE

1st June 2021 Contribution of Archbishop Emeritus Luigi Bressan (Trento, Italy)

I feel moved to speak among you all. A group with such rich spirituality and deep pastoral commitment. I sincerely thank my esteemed confrere Msgr Sithembele Antonio Sipuka. I will not therefore repeat what he said, but I consider it acquired as a fundamental framework into which I will insert some points whilst focusing our attitude, as bishops, on solidarity and its Christian motivations and in the context not only of the inter-religious but also of the international institutions starting with the UN and its specialised Agencies. I will also keep in mind the various Governments and the best-known foundations such as Médecins sans Frontières, Save the Children, the Red Cross Society, up to the numerous local NGOs. Many draw on religious roots, others on purely human and philosophical grounds, such as humanitarian sentiment, the duty of restorative justice and the conviction that there is a commonality of interest for the good of all peoples. These are true values. Christ takes them up with a dynamic that elevates and integrates them.

1. The music of the Gospel: an uplifting vision

In the encyclical **Fratelli Tutti** Pope Francis confirms that the Church appreciates God's action in other religions, but as believers in Christ, [he says] “we Christians are very much aware that “if the music of the Gospel ceases to resonate in our very being, we will lose the joy born of compassion, the tender love born of trust, the capacity for reconciliation that has its source in our knowledge that we have been forgiven and sent forth. If the music of the Gospel ceases to sound in our homes, our public squares, our workplaces, our political and financial life, then we will no longer hear the strains that challenge us to defend the dignity of every man and woman”. Others drink from other sources. For us the wellspring of human dignity and fraternity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ”. [FT 277]

Music is the noblest of the arts and for this reason its name sums up all the muses. It is something ethereal, yet while it contributes to the health of the body, it inspires noble gazes; it does not escape the materiality of instruments or bodily physics, but is not restricted within the limits of tangibility; it sees beyond, elevates towards beauty, overcomes the limits of human idioms. It is an inner force that unites and shapes people and communities. That is why the Pope speaks to us of the music of the Gospel, which exhorts us to aim for a sublime goal: “Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5: 48). Some tell us that the economy has its own laws and considers them to be unbreakable, but the Gospel proposes an economy of communion, showing us the example of the first Christians in Jerusalem. The current economic system increases differences, but St. Paul urges us to share equally. An industry has developed that eliminates goods and moves towards a progressive and destructive

degradation of creation, but the Bible exhorts us to cherish and even cultivate and thus improve the earth through a circular, productive economy that leaves future generations a liveable environment. We are invited to accept the Pope's invitation to detach ourselves from the sociological viewpoint and from the prevailing thought within world finance, so that the Gospel may guide us with its vision of high and wide panoramas. This is the only way forward, and herein lies the vast prophetic task of us bishops.

2. A proactive ethic

The Pope's statement contradicts a very widespread culture according to which Christian ethics would insist on what cannot/should not be done. When they hear the words "moral doctrine" and "ethics" the thought goes to the prohibitions and the limits that they demand. Often the words "modern progress" and "ethics" evoke a dilemma.

It is clear that a pastoral task immediately arises here for us as educators of the people and of public opinion, because Christian ethics is above all positive, a global commitment to promoting the dignity of every human being and indeed an integral ecology. This is the leitmotif of the music of the Gospel. The silver rule for good social living, which aims to avoid evil, is superseded by the evangelical rule, known as the golden rule, which asks us to do unto others what we would have them do to us (cfr. Mt 7: 12). Furthermore, the Bible does not limit itself to peaceful coexistence either but invites us to make ourselves as close to others as the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 33 et seq.) and reinforces what anthropology, philosophy and international law affirm about the unity of humankind. St Paul writing to the Christians in the cosmopolitan city of Ephesus recalled that there is "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all" (Eph 4: 6). A stronger and more motivated assertion is not found elsewhere and is placed as a justification for an attitude to be had in concrete life. Moreover, Christianity preaching the Incarnation does not remain in the world of principles, but rather comes down to animate daily life, with its joys and labours, hopes and anxieties, successes and failures, and always with a sense of mission to be carried out.

The fact that Pope Francis speaks of a 'music' in the concert of the world indicates that silence, that is, merely avoiding evil, does not satisfy him and does not correspond to the message of Jesus. As Baptised people, we cannot sit in the audience and enjoy the spectacle of the world; we are called to the stage to be an active part of the choir or orchestra, producers and not just receivers of the music. For Christ has commanded us "Go ye into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16: 15); He made it clear that it is not enough for us to have a heavy or merely suffered existence, but rather a life in its fullness (Jn 10: 10) and wants us to bear fruit (Jn 15: 16), that we know how to make a contribution to society. It is a positive love that he demands of us and to a high degree: "love one another, as I have loved you" (Jn 13: 34). The standard is so high that we do not pretend to reach it, but it encourages us to do better and better. After all, we will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven if we have not worked for the Kingdom of God on earth (cfr. Mt 25: 31-46). It will be the task of our catechesis, as well

as of the catechumenate and ordinary pastoral work, to form consciences towards such a positive orientation of life, taking co-responsibility for the common good.

3. Witnesses to the beauty of the gift

We also dispel the misconception that giving of oneself to others, i.e. choosing altruism as the guiding principle of life, leads to a sad existence. Jesus said: "As the Father hath loved me, I also have loved you. Abide in my love... These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be filled" (Jn 15: 9). Narcissism leads to boredom, to the narrow limits of individualism. This is also taught to us in the Gospel (Jn 12: 25). On the other hand, the Beatitudes, in both Luke's and Matthew's versions, have joy as their end. The last words of the Last Judgment for those who were not indifferent to the suffering of others and acted accordingly are: "Come, ye blessed of my Father" (Mt 25: 34). Unfortunately, the recognition of human rights, a great achievement for all humanity, has been diverted towards a self-centred individualism, which distorts the nature of the human being and causes violence, injustice and a loss of joy and often even the meaning of life. The musical harmony of human coexistence has been lost and only the cries of individuals can be heard! It is a great task of Christ's disciples to bring this sense of integral development back into the concert of a humanity walking together.

4. Born and Baptised to love

We also know that many of our contemporaries do not like external standards; well, love for one's neighbour is not a questionable rule, but is born, according to our faith, from human nature itself. The Bible teaches us that the human being was created in the image of God; faith has made us discover that He is unique, but in three Persons who give themselves constantly; God is not a solitary, single being, and even less is immobile. We bear His image, but above all in Baptism we are immersed in that dynamic of love that is present in the Trinity, where there is respect for the identities of the Persons, but with constant giving. Jesus told us: "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you" (Mk 9: 36; Jn 12: 44; 20: 21). The Trinitarian mystery is not pure speculative theology, but a source of vital impetus.

It is from Him that love comes to us through Jesus Christ. It is not our initiative: "You have not chosen me: but I have chosen you; and have appointed you, that you should go, and should bring forth fruit; and your fruit should remain" (Jn 15: 16; 1 Jn 4: 19). This renders all of us humble, who try to work for the good of others; we have no reason to consider ourselves superior, but only people trying to respond to a love that goes before us and knowing that we are doing so in an insufficient manner.

The Christian social worker will act in a way that surpasses in delicacy, professionalism and dedication that of the state civil service or the United Nations volunteers (whom we appreciate for what they give); they will know how to refer to Christ in their instinctive affection, not to likes or dislikes. Allow me to give an example: One day I asked a young

Cambodian seminarian, who was formerly a Buddhist, how he came to decide to go into the ministerial priesthood. He told me that he had been a refugee and among those assisting them, he had noticed a better group than the others; he asked who was sending them and they replied "Jesus Christ". Surprised that they knew how to inspire such goodness - it was the music of the Gospel - he wanted to get to know this Jesus, arriving at his Baptism and then choosing to announce him to his compatriots. It is obvious that the Christian approach to solidarity concerns all aspects of the human being, being able to look to the admirable example of Jesus, who said to the paralytic, "thy sins are forgiven thee" and, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go" (Mt 9: 2-8).

5. Symphonic harmony

Another characteristic of Christian music is that it is not a 'solo'. In fact, we were not Baptised to live separately from one another. St Peter wrote to his Christians that they should love each other with brotherly love (that is practicing the *adelfia*) because they were an objective fraternity (namely an *adelfotès*); to this, all are called. St Cyril of Alexandria, one of the great African saints, commented: "For while the Spirit, Which is One, abideth in us, the One God and Father of all will be in us, binding together into unity with each other and with Himself whatsoever partaketh of the Spirit. And that we are made one with the Holy Spirit through partaking of It, will be made manifest hereby" (Commentary on the Gospel of John, Book 11, 11). Associations for progress in the form of fraternities, parishes, committees, cooperatives, NGOs, federations or social enterprises not only respond to the principle that unity is strength and effectiveness is increased, but also to our being God's family, called to reproduce the Trinitarian model on earth, both for local development and international cooperation. In this network of solidarity, we recall the PP OO MM, Caritas International and local Caritas, CIDSE, etc., promoting this coordination and monitoring its dynamics.

The Church contributes to the harmony of the world by being the voice of the most forgotten, by giving them priority. It is a task of advocacy for us Bishops individually and collegially, but also for every Baptised person; the Popes give us an example. As early as the 1940s, Pius XII called for the creation of a large global development fund. The idea of allocating one percent of GDP to this fund (now set at 0.70%) was first expressed by the Ecumenical Council of Churches in 1958 and has a strong supporter in the Catholic world. Accustomed to examining the conscience of behaviour, both in daily spirituality and before the sacrament of penance, Christians will feel the need for upright behaviour but also to call for altruistic generosity where selfishness reigns and for the honest use of goods where there is squandering or corruption. Faith in God reminds us that there is a judgement on us and that we have responsibilities that go beyond human law or public scrutiny.

6. Prayer and hope

Prayer is an important element in contributing to the common good. I should dwell on this as an irreplaceable religious approach and not just as a last, but rather a first resort. We begin with the Lord's Prayer, asking for the Kingdom of God to come and for no one to be lacking in daily bread. Today we lack the time. We see in the Gospel that Jesus himself prayed; Luke shows us this at least a dozen times and Jesus urged us to address our prayers to the Almighty. Before the multiplication of the loaves, he raised a blessing to God. We owe this service to believers and non-believers alike. I should say more but there is no time.

However, I cannot omit one important factor that the Christian faith brings to this world concert, and that is trust in the future, both for those in difficulty and for those who give and want to build fraternity. In fact, hope is not based solely on the objective elements of history and even less on the statistics of the present, but rather on the power that conquered death itself in the Paschal Mystery and on the word of the One who died and rose again for us and told us: "Fear not", "and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (Mt 10: 28-32; 28: 20; Lk 12: 32). The liturgy proclaims: "The Spirit of the Lord fills the universe", even if a time of waiting is necessary, as was for Jesus' disciples with Mary in the Upper Room. Now trust is an indispensable but also effective lever of progress, without it there would be no commitment, or it would collapse in the face of obstacles. In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis asserted that time is superior to space (no. 222-225) and that "The joy of the Gospel is such that it cannot be taken away from us by anyone or anything [cfr. Jn 16: 22]" (no. 84). In fact, Jesus teaches us: "In your patience you shall possess your souls" ... "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Lk 21: 18.33). In a weary and disillusioned world let us unite our energies and bring the enthusiasm that comes from a God who renews the beauty of music, as the psalmist says (*Deus qui laetificat juventutem meam*): "Send forth thy light and thy truth: they have conducted me... I will go unto the altar of God: to God who giveth joy to my youth. To thee, O God my God, I will give praise upon the harp" (Ps (42)43: 3-4).

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