

No Longer Slaves, but Brothers and Sisters

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A task of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace

First of all I would like to convey Cardinal Peter Turkson's greetings to the President, all the Members and the Chancellor of the *Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*. I would also like to thank you for the opportunity given to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace to present Pope Francis's Message for the World Day of Peace of this year, 2015. The Pope's message, *No Longer Slaves, but Brothers and Sisters*, touches in great part the issues that will be treated in this Plenary Session.

In fact, an important task assigned to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is to work to form among peoples a mentality which fosters peace, especially on the occasion of World Peace Day.¹

The Message for the World Day of Peace

It may be useful to briefly recall the origin and some of the characteristics of this initiative, which is due to Blessed Paul VI and has been taken forward by his Successors as well.

In 1967, the very year in which he created the Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax*, Paul VI also launched the idea of the observance of a Day of Peace on the first day of the year.

In so doing, the Pope presented this proposal not as "exclusively ours, religious, that is, Catholic"². He wanted "all the true friends of Peace" to consider the initiative their own.

Moreover, the Pope gave another indication which suits well with the frankness that has been required by the Chancellor for the works of this Plenary: "A warning must be kept in mind," he wrote in this first Message, "Peace cannot be based on a false rhetoric of words which are welcomed because they answer to the deep, genuine aspirations of humanity, but which can also serve, and unfortunately have sometimes served, to hide the lack of true spirit and of real intentions for peace, if not indeed to mask sentiments and actions of oppression

¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, art. 143

² Paul VI, *Message for the Observance of a Day of Peace*, 1 January 1968.

and party interests."³

It is also interesting to point out, finally, that the Message is officially presented at the beginning of every New Year by the Apostolic Nuncios to the Heads of Government and of International Institutions. The Message proposes, in that way, for the consideration of those responsible for public life and policy the issue that is considered by the Popes, year after year, to be ever more topical and urgent.

The role of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace

The Pontifical Council has a particular role in the choice of the theme of the Message, helping the Holy Father to identify the subject that, in his opinion, needs to be tackled most urgently in order to achieve peaceful coexistence among the human family. This is why, on the basis of the exchanges in the numerous visits received at the Dicastery, the many contacts that the President and the Officials have around the world, and after the so called annual "interdicasterial consultation", the Pontifical Council submits to the Holy Father a list of three issues that it thinks deserve to be treated. For the Message of this year, the 48th Message, besides the one on the *persisting slavery in today's world*, the three subjects were *poverty*, and *family*.

The interest and the concern of Pope Francis for the issue of the contemporary forms of slavery are well known, particularly by the Members of this *Pontifical Academy*. It was not difficult to predict then that his choice would fall on this issue. Indeed, we sadly receive daily confirmation of the justness of Pope Francis's opinion by reading reports and by watching television news broadcasts.

No Longer Slaves, but Brothers and Sisters

As it is usually the case, there is a link in between the Messages for the World Day of Peace. *Fraternity* is the link between the 2015 Message and the previous year's, which was dedicated to brotherhood (*Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace*). Being children of God gives all human beings equal dignity as brothers and sisters. Slavery deals a murderous blow to this fundamental fraternity, and so to peace as well. Peace can only exist when each human being recognizes every other person as a brother or sister with the same dignity.

By addressing the contemporary forms of slavery in the 2015 Message, Pope Francis not only considers the foundation of peace, but also its concrete achievement in interpersonal relations. The scheme of the document is quite simple and logical.

³ *ibid.*

- Drawing inspiration from the Epistle of Paul to Philemon and other passages from the Scriptures, the Holy Father shows that God's plan does not have any place for the enslavement of others, since God calls to all of his sons and daughters to renew their interpersonal relationships as brothers and sisters. This, being well aware that fraternity also embraces variety and differences between them even though they are linked by birth and are of the same nature and dignity⁴.
- Tragically, the negative reality of sin has often disrupted human fraternity and constantly disfigures our *being brothers and sisters* in the one human family. The sin of estrangement from God, becomes then an expression of the refusal of communion and gives rise to a culture of enslavement (cf. *Gen 9:25-27*). Hence the need for constant conversion to the Covenant, fulfilled by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.
- Afterward, after having recalled how "from time immemorial" different societies have known the phenomenon of slavery, generally accepted and regulated by law in periods of human history, Pope Francis affirms that today, as the result of a growth in our awareness, slavery is considered as a "crime against humanity"⁵ and has been formally abolished. This definition of slavery as a crime against humanity had been used by the Holy Father in addressing the Delegates of the *International Association of Peace Law* on 23 October 2014. On the other hand, this wording was also present in the *Statement* issued by the Members of this *Pontifical Academy* participating in the Workshop on *Trafficking in Human Beings* in November 2013.
- In this same passage of the Message (nr.3) Pope Francis stresses how, in spite of the existing national legislations and numerous international agreements aimed to end slavery, millions of people are forced to live in this condition. Then, the Message identifies the main forms of contemporary slavery. They are grouped in the different categories under which the phenomenon is experienced by men and women today: in labor conditions, in migration, in being forced to prostitution, in being victims of kidnapping by terrorist groups.
- In section 4 of the Message there is an attempt to determine the causes of the modern forms of slavery that will be the subject of the in-depth study of today's session. Besides the deeper, ontological, cause due to sin, the Message only quickly mentions: poverty, lack of education, underemployment and unemployment, armed conflicts,

⁴ cf *Message for the 2015 World Day of Peace*, n.2

⁵ cf *Address to Delegates of the International Association of Peace Law*, 23 October 2014.

violence, criminal terrorism and the “festering wound”⁶ of corruption. All of these factors, in addition to greed and thirst for money, contribute to making those persons who become the objects of trafficking for the sale of organs, for forced recruitment as soldiers, for begging, for illegal activities or for disguised forms of cross-border adoption.

- After looking at the causes of the phenomenon, Pope Francis calls for a shared commitment to ending slavery, at different levels and by the Catholic Church, with efforts that need to be expanded in years to come. This section 5 of the Message is crucial for the works of the present Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.
- The call for globalizing fraternity and rejecting slavery and indifference in the light of the human experience of St. Josephine Bakhita closes the 2015 Message of the World Day of Peace.

A few relevant points

In order to avoid to “repeat expressions of moral outrage” as recommended by His Excellency the Chancellor, I would just indicate some points of the Message that seem to me to connect well with the subjects that will be tackled in the next days.

- The 2015 Message appears to be **more concrete** than the previous ones. Precise reference is made to the tasks of all the actors, starting by what is done by religious congregations, especially women’s congregations. For this reason, one of the speakers at the Press Conference for the presentation of the Message on 10 December 2014 was Sr. Gabriella Bottani who presented the work carried out by the International Network of Consecrated Life against Human Trafficking, *Talitha Kum*, and some other religious sisters who are concretely committed in this pastoral activity and were also attending the Press Conference. The opportunity to give visibility to those engaged in working with persons who work directly with the victims to help them is something new and highly valuable.
- The principle of rejecting slavery is formally recognized and, generally speaking, the phenomenon is considered a pure anachronism. Sadly we know that this is not the case. **The Church** from her side has contributed from the earliest centuries to the positive development of consciousness which brought to consider slavery as a “crime against

⁶ *Misericordiae Vultus*, n. 19.

humanity". The fact that a Message on the contemporary forms of slavery issued by the Leader of the Catholic Church is presented to the heads of Governments and States should at least call their attention on the issue its seriousness, and the urgency to counteract it.

- "The right of each person not to be kept in a state of slavery or servitude has been recognized in international law as inviolable"⁷. The problem arises with **the implementation of these legal instruments**. The Pope recommends, in fact, that the State provides that its laws "include effective means of enforcement which leave no room for corruption or impunity"⁸. He had been even more explicit in the Address to the Delegates of the International Association of Peace Law (23 October 2014), which I recalled earlier.
- **What to do then?** In order to fight against the forms of slavery present today, the Message indicates what should be done at the various levels involved.

At the *institutional level*: prevention, protection and rehabilitation of the victims, legal persecution of perpetrators, and effective means of enforcement are needed.

At the *level of the Intergovernmental organizations*: coordination of initiatives is necessary for combating the transnational networks of organized crime that oversee the trafficking of persons and the illegal trafficking of migrants.

At the *level of business*: the social responsibility of *entrepreneurs* on one hand and of *consumers* on the other is also invoked. Dignified working conditions and adequate salaries are to be ensured by the business leaders, but they also must be vigilant that forms of subjugation or human trafficking are not present in the distribution chain. The consumers, for their part, should be continually educated regarding their role, which can be exercised with respect for moral principles without diminishing the economic rationality of purchasing⁹.

The *civil society*, at its level, has the crucial task of awakening consciences and promoting initiatives for combating and uprooting the culture of enslavement.

As for the mission of the *Church*: it is essentially religious but has public implications in different forms at all levels.

As already pointed out, the work of *religious congregations* has been specifically mentioned in the Message. The religious, women and men, carry out their activities of assistance to the victims, for

⁷ *Message for the 2015 World Day of Peace*, n. 3.

⁸ *ibid*, n. 5.

⁹ cf Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 66.

their psychological and educational rehabilitation and for their reintegration into society. We will hear more on this subject next Monday.

To *every Christian* the Message proposes the story of Josephine Bakhita as an example of hope that invites to practice acts of fraternity, to open the eyes and to overcome indifference.

Finally, Pope Francis recognizes that "we are facing a global phenomenon which exceeds the competence of any one community or country. In order to eliminate it, we need a *mobilization comparable in size* to that of the phenomenon itself"¹⁰.

The *Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences* is at the forefront of this mobilization, from the scientific point of view and from the inter-religious perspective as well, and the works of the present session will give further impetus to this work.

¹⁰ *Message for the 2015 World Day of Peace*, n. 6