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Evangelii Gaudium: A European Perspective

Dr. Salvatore Moccia

"Vive, Ulixes, dum licet: oculis postremum lumen radiatum rape."
—Cicero, De orator

et me confess to you a secret. In March of 2013 I was having lunch with a good friend of mine from Argentina and I asked him the following: do you know that the next Pope will be from Argentina? As a Professor of Strategic Management, I spent several days analyzing the possible papal options (correct, without considering the Holy Spirit). As observer, I saw a world experiencing global problems such as corporate scandals, pollution, terrorism, war, and the divide between the rich and the poor. I was also observing a religious crisis in South America, the "continent of hope", and the supposed divide between theologians and pragmatists. My strategic conclusions—reflected in an article that I published in a newspaper—were the following: the next Pope will be a Spanish-speaker, but not from Spain, with an Italian surname, and with strong theological background but a great pragmatism. I was thinking about a person with strong empathy, concise and with a strong personality. Therefore, my mind went to countries in South-America, in particular to Argentina (land of both Italian surnames and strong personalities) where I found two possible candidates. Still, even if in the most perfect forecast, a Jesuit candidate would have been out of my thoughts. However, as we are people of faith, we have also to take into consideration the Holy Spirit that is not subject to the rule of management—and that's good!

I am telling you this because to understand the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, we have to analyze the strategic roots of this fantastic Pope, a shepherd who lived his life with the smell of the sheep. As Pope Francis (2013, March 28) underlined in the homily at Saint Peter's Basilica:

Those who do not go out of themselves, instead of being mediators, gradually become intermediaries, managers. We know the difference: the intermediary, the manager, "has already received his reward", and since he doesn't put his own skin and his own heart on the line, he never hears a warm, heartfelt word of thanks. (Francis, 2013, March 28)

This is one of the great messages of Pope Francis: put your own skin and your own heart on the line and smell like a sheep.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons, and the lay faithful on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world (2013) should be understood only if we recognize that:

The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. (Francis, 2013, para. 2)

Only if we recognize this "great enemy" we can fully understand all the Papal "No's" of the Encyclical: **no** to an economy of exclusion, **no** to the new idolatry of money, **no** to a financial system which rules rather than serves, and **no** to the inequality which spawns violence.

Let us analyze the four papal "No's" stemming from his Apostolic Exhortation more in depth.

No to an economy of exclusion

As Pope Francis (2013) states:

Just as the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say "thou shalt not" to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. (para. 53)

In the same vein, another Pope – John Paul II -, in his December 3rd 1990 address to the Presidents of the Industrial Conferences of Europe, expressed that:

The Church, in its social teaching, respects and defends the right of economic initiative as an expression of the subjective creativity of individuals and groups. But she emphasizes strongly that the economic process, which has a decisive influence on the life of almost every inhabitant of the earth, does not end in the production of wealth and material goods. Economic activity has an intrinsic social and moral function stemming from the inalienable dignity of the people involved and from the principle of the prior universal destination of goods (para. 2).

Using some managerial words, I would say that from the papal perspective the business of business should not be business, but the capacity of the economic activity to dignify the human being, to look after the less privileged, and to invest wealth and potential in the growth of people and countries. Indeed, the "globalization of indifference" concept was already presented to the public by Pope Francis, before his Apostolic Exhortation. In his first visit outside Rome since becoming Pope, Francis (2013, July 8) visited migrants on the island of Lampedusa, lambasting the rich world for its lack of concern for their suffering and inveighing against a "globalization of indifference".

As he stated during his homily, "Who is responsible for this globalization of indifference? No one! That is our answer: It isn't me; I don't have anything to do with it; it must be someone else, but certainly not me" (Francis, July 8).

Still, in the same homily, Pope Francis reminded us that:

In Spanish literature we have a comedy of Lope de Vega which tells how the people of the town of Fuente Ovejuna kill their governor because he is a tyrant. They do it in such a way that no one knows who the actual killer is. So when the royal judge asks: "Who killed the governor?", they all reply: "Fuente Ovejuna, sir". Everyone and no one! (Francis, July 8)

Today too, the question must be asked: Who is responsible for this globalization of indifference? Again, Pope Francis (2017, May 27) provides us an answer. In his meeting with businessmen and workers at the ILVA factory in Genova on May 27th 2017, the Pope presented the profile of the good businessman ("the good shepherd") compared to the profile of the speculator ("the mercenary"). The good businessman knows his workers because he works with them. The Pope reminds us that the businessman has to be a worker. He has to have the experience of the dignity of work, and share with his workers struggles, and happiness. A good businessman understands that if one member suffers, all suffer together. He fights for his workers and he does everything he can to avoid dismissing workers. On the other side, one of the illnesses of the actual economy is to transform businessmen into speculators. Speculators do not love their workers, and consider them as consumer goods to be used and then discarded. Speculators use companies to make profits dismissing, moving factories, and destroying resources for the profit. With speculators, the economy loses its aspect and forgets persons. It becomes an economy without persons, an abstract and cruel economy. Still, the Pope reminds us that we have to fight against the speculators, not businessmen.

Finally, he cited some words from Luigi Einaudi, economist and former President of the Italian Republic:

Thousands, millions of people work, produce and save money regardless of what you could do to bother them, stop them and discourage them. It is a natural vocation that drives them, not only the desire to earn. The wish, the pride of seeing one's business thrive, gain credit, inspire confidence in an ever increasing clientele, the expansion of plants, are a prod to move forward as strong as earnings. Without that, we could not explain all those businessmen who invest all their energies and capitals to get less benefits that could be easily gained speculating. (Francis, 2017, May 27)

No to the new idolatry of money

Here, Pope Francis (2013) goes directly to the point:

The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person! We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. Ex 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption. (para. 55)

Indeed, Pope Francis (2017, February 4) went back to the imbalances of the economy during his address to the participants in the meeting "Economy of Communion". When talking about economy and communion, two words that should be not separated or considered opposites, he presents his concern about money. Money, according to him, "...is important, especially when there is none, and food, school, and the children's future depend on it. But it becomes an idol when it becomes the aim". When speculators and capitalism make the seeking of profits its only purpose, it runs the risk of becoming an idolatrous framework, a form of worship. In the same homily, Pope Francis also suggests that:

The best and most practical way to avoid making an idol of money is to share it, share

it with others, above all with the poor, or to enable young people to study and work, overcoming the idolatrous temptation with communion. (Francis, 2017, February 4).

In this respect, it is also worth mentioning the position of Pope John XXIII (1961) when, in his encyclical Mater et Magistra, he presents the social function of property:

Hence, as Leo XIII so wisely taught in Rerum Novarum: "whoever has received from the divine bounty a large share of temporal blessings, whether they be external and corporeal, or gifts of the mind, has received them for the purpose of using them for the perfecting of his own nature, and, at the same time, that he may employ them, as the steward of God's Providence, for the benefit of others. 'He that hath a talent,' says St. Gregory the Great, 'let him see that he hide it not; he that hath abundance, let him quicken himself to mercy and generosity; he that hath art and skill, let him do his best to share the use and the utility thereof with his neighbor.' " (119).

Going back to *Evangelii Gaudium*, another great point presented by Pope Francis (2013) in this part of the Apostolic Exhortation is about corruption, tax evasion and the tyranny of increasing profits:

Debt and the accumulation of interest also make it difficult for countries to realize the potential of their own economies and keep citizens from enjoying their real purchasing power. To all this we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions. The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule. (para. 56)

Pope Francis (2013, November 11) already introduced the topic of corruption — or better — to the corrupt, whose "double lives" he called a "varnished putrefaction" - during his morning

meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae. The Pope concluded his meditation saying:

A varnished putrefaction: this is the life of someone who is corrupt. And Jesus does not call them simply sinners. He calls them hypocrites. And yet Jesus always forgives, he never tires of forgiving. The only thing he asks is that there be no desire to lead this double life. Let us ask the Lord for the grace to flee from every form of deceit and to see ourselves as sinners. Sinners yes, corrupt no. (Francis, 2013, November 11)

Speaking about taxes, it is also worth mentioning again the Encyclical by Pope John XXIII (1961), where the Pope stressed the importance of a taxation system based on justice and equity where burden is proportioned to the capacity of the people contributing. Indeed, Pope Benedict XVI (2009) already was observing the importance of businessmen to act according to moral values and ethics. In fact, in his Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, he calls attention to the Church's social doctrine that:

Holds that authentically human social relationships of friendship, solidarity and reciprocity can also be conducted within economic activity, and not only outside it or "after" it. The economic sphere is neither ethically neutral, nor inherently inhuman and opposed to society. It is part and parcel of human activity and precisely because it is human, it must be structured and governed in an ethical manner. (para. 36)

No to a financial system which rules rather than serves

In a wonderful article written by Sir Richard Layard in 2009, the author expressed the importance of returning to a capitalism based on values. According to the author, the "accelerated economic growth is not a goal for which we should make large sacrifices. In particular, we should not sacrifice the most important source of happiness, which is the quality of human relationships – at home, at work and in the community...our society

has become too individualistic, with too much rivalry and not enough common purpose." Pope Francis (2013), in his Apostolic Exhortation, recalls the need of money to serve, not rule! He reminds everyone that:

The Pope loves everyone, rich and poor alike, but he is obliged in the name of Christ to remind all that the rich must help, respect and promote the poor. I exhort you to generous solidarity and to the return of economics and finance to an ethical approach which favors human beings. (para. 58)

Indeed, the human dimension of the work and the financial system that should serve and not rule, are concepts that are frequently expressed by Pope Francis during his speeches. For example, recalling the speech by His Holiness to the workers at the factory Ilva in Genoa on May 27th 2017, Pope Francis (2017, May 27) stressed that the values of the work are changing a lot and quickly. And, unfortunately, most of those values are no longer in line with the human dimension. The accent on competition, apart from being an anthropological and Christian mistake, is also an economic mistake because it forgets that business is, first of all, cooperation, mutual assistance, and reciprocity. When a company creates a scientific system based on workers' competition, perhaps it can obtain good results in the short run, but at the end, the system will undermine trust that is the soul of each organization. Then, when a crisis occurs, the company disappears because there is no link among the members.

Another good point made by Pope Francis (2017, May 27) in the same speech regards the importance of "brother-work" when it is accompanied by the no-work time: "Slaves do not have freetime". According to him, work should always be accompanied by free-time, otherwise we will be ruled by the system rather than served. We can find another great reflection of Pope Francis (2017, March 24) on the actual circumstances in his address to the Heads of State and Government of the European Union in Italy for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. In his

speech, Pope Francis underlines that:

The world has changed greatly in the last sixty years. If the founding fathers, after surviving a devastating conflict, were inspired by the hope of a better future and were determined to pursue it by avoiding the rise of new conflicts, our time is dominated more by the concept of crisis. There is the economic crisis that has marked the past decade; there is the crisis of the family and of established social models; there is a widespread "crisis of institutions" and the migration crisis. So many crises that engender fear and profound confusion in our contemporaries, who look for a new way of envisioning the future. Yet the term "crisis" is not necessarily negative. It does not simply indicate a painful moment to be endured. The word "crisis" has its origin in the Greek verb kríno, which means to discern, to weigh, to assess. Ours is a time of discernment, one that invites us to determine what is essential and to build on it. It is a time of challenge and opportunity.

In reality, Pope John Paul II (1990), in his address to the Presidents of the Industrial conferences of Europe, already was speaking about the role of Europe in business:

Europe has the historical foundations and the spiritual and cultural resources necessary to build a way of life based on a humanism capable of correcting the materialistic and technological excesses present in other models of development. Business and industry will contribute to the achievement of this goal in the measure that they pursue objectives that are not merely economic but truly human. (para. 3)

Indeed, the link between business and common good was also expressed by Pope Benedict XVI (2009) in his Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, when he points out that:

Profit is useful if it serves as a means towards an end that provides a sense both of how to produce it and how to make good use of it. Once profit becomes the exclusive goal, if it

is produced by improper means and without the common good as its ultimate end, it risks destroying wealth and creating poverty... Development is impossible without upright men and women, without financiers and politicians whose consciences are finely attuned to the requirements of the common good. Both professional competence and moral consistency are necessary. When technology is allowed to take over, the result is confusion between ends and means, such that the sole criterion for action in business is thought to be the maximization of profit, in politics the consolidation of power, and in science the findings of research. Often, underneath the intricacies of economic, financial and political interconnections, there remain misunderstandings, hardships and injustice. The flow of technological knowhow increases, but it is those in possession of it who benefit, while the situation on the ground for the people who live in its shadow remains unchanged: for them there is little chance of emancipation. (para. 21)

Finally, it is worthy to mention the words of Cardinal Caffara (2008), during a speech at the Prefecture of Bologna on November 15th, 2008, pointing out that globalization should not be condemned but governed, and finance should serve and not rule.

No to the inequality which spawns violence

Pope Francis (2013), in his Apostolic Exhortation reminds us that:

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. This is not the case simply because inequality provokes a violent reaction from those excluded from the system, but because the socioeconomic system is unjust at its root. Just as goodness tends to spread, the toleration of evil, which is injustice, tends to expand its baneful influence and quietly to undermine any political and social system, no matter how solid it may appear.

If every action has its consequences, an evil embedded in the structures of a society has a constant potential for disintegration and death. (para. 59)

Pope Benedict XVI (2009) may have already been speaking about the importance of eradication of poverty and inequality which could provoke violence, erode the social capital of the world and put in danger democracies. In fact, in his Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* he points out that:

Through the systemic increase of social inequality, both within a single country and between the populations of different countries (i.e. the massive increase in relative poverty), not only does social cohesion suffer, thereby placing democracy at risk, but so too does the economy, through the progressive erosion of "social capital": the network of relationships of trust, dependability, and respect for rules, all of which are indispensable for any form of civil coexistence. (para. 32)

Previously, as Cardinal Ratzinger (1986), he already spoke of inequality for the world. In fact, in an article presented at a symposium in Rome, "Church and Economy in dialogue", he indicated that:

The economic inequality between the northern and southern hemispheres of the globe is becoming more and more an inner threat to the cohesion of the human family, The danger for our future from such a threat may be no less than that proceeding from the weapon arsenals with which the East and the West oppose one another.

Indeed, also Pope John Paul II (1990) addresses the issue of the need for a "common enterprise" in his speech to the Presidents of the Industrial Conferences of Europe, previously mentioned. In the closing remarks, John Paul II invited participants "...to work in 'your common enterprise' for the well-being of the millions of human beings in Europe and elsewhere who stand to benefit from the realization of an authentically human development and progress" (para. 5).

Moreover, if we go back to the end of the first

World War, and the end of the Great Depression, we find an interesting analysis of the importance of reducing inequalities that spawn violence in the Pius XI (1931) Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, where he points out that:

...it is obvious that not only is wealth concentrated in our times but an immense power and despotic economic dictatorship is consolidated in the hands of a few, who often are not owners but only the trustees and managing directors of invested funds which they administer according to their own arbitrary will and pleasure. This dictatorship is being most forcibly exercised by those who, since they hold the money and completely control it, control credit also and rule the lending of money. Hence they regulate the flow, so to speak, of the life-blood whereby the entire economic system lives, and have so firmly in their grasp the soul, as it were, of economic life that no one can breathe against their will. This concentration of power and might, the characteristic mark, as it were, of contemporary economic life, is the fruit that the unlimited freedom of struggle among competitors has of its own nature produced, and which lets only the strongest survive; and this is often the same as saying, those who fight the most violently, those who give least heed to their conscience. (para. 105-107)

Conclusions

Cardinal Bergoglio, when elected, chose the name Francis, remembering one the most beloved saints of both the past and the present. We believe he chose this name being conscious of the richness of the message of Saint Francis, and with the will to put in practice the Franciscan teachings. In fact, Franciscans have been living all their ecumenical lives addressing the problem of poor and rich, common good and private benefit, etc. As a matter of fact, the first pawnshop was founded by a Franciscan, Monk Michele Carcano, and was developed by another Franciscan Monk Bernardino da Feltre. The fundamental nature of a

pawnshop is the common good, and the merchant is recognized as guaranteeing common happiness, being the person capable of coordinating the activities of producers, consumers, and other professionals. The consequences of the Franciscan reflections on the role of merchants imply the need to define some criteria to recognize them (the businessmen) and to avoid confusing them with the speculators. We strongly believe that Pope Francis, with his Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, has updated most of the Franciscan reflections on the role of economy in the world, presenting those characteristics that we can use to depict the businessman and to unmask the speculator. Let us try to resume them: justice, no inequalities, primacy of human beings, common good, altruistic, virtues and ethics. We are almost certain that we are forgetting other elements. However, if we are able to focus only on those and put them in practice, we are already walking to the daily sanctity.

Lastly, keeping in mind the Franciscan heritage, I close this article remembering the words of Cardinal Montini (1958, October 4) - future Pope Paul VI - in Assisi on the 4th of October 1958:

...is it possible, Francis, to manage the goods of this world without being kept prisoners or victims? Is it possible to conciliate our apprehension of economic life without losing our soul and our love? Is it possible to build a friendship between Mother Economy and Mother Poverty? Or are we inexorably condemned? Help us, Francis, to be poor, indeed free and detached, in the search and use of these earthly goods, heavy and fleeting, because if we remain men, we remain brothers, and we remain Christians. (p. 492)

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