



Fighting Poverty to Build Peace

Quotes from the *Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI* *for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace* "Fighting Poverty To Build Peace" January 1, 2009

Poverty contributes to conflict.

"Back in 1993, my venerable Predecessor Pope John Paul II, in his Message for the World Day of Peace that year, drew attention to the negative repercussions for peace when entire populations live in poverty. Poverty is often a contributory factor or a compounding element in conflicts, including armed ones. In turn, these conflicts fuel further tragic situations of poverty. "Our world", he wrote, "shows increasing evidence of another grave threat to peace: many individuals and indeed whole peoples are living today in conditions of extreme poverty" (no. 1).

Poverty is a threat to human dignity.

"The gap between rich and poor has become more marked, even in the most economically developed nations. This is a problem which the conscience of humanity cannot ignore, since the conditions in which a great number of people are living are an insult to their innate dignity and as a result are a threat to the authentic and harmonious progress of the world community" (no. 1).

Wealthy societies suffer from moral and spiritual poverty.

"Non-material forms of poverty exist which are not the direct and automatic consequence of material deprivation. For example, in advanced wealthy societies, there is evidence of marginalization, as well as affective, moral and spiritual poverty, seen in people whose interior lives are disoriented and who experience various forms of malaise despite their economic prosperity. On the one hand, I have in mind what is known as "moral underdevelopment", and on the other hand the negative consequences of 'superdevelopment'" (no. 2).

Population is an asset, not a problem.

"Poverty is often considered a consequence of demographic change. For this reason, there are international campaigns afoot to reduce birth-rates, sometimes using methods that respect neither the dignity of the woman, nor the right of parents to choose responsibly how many children to have; graver still, these methods often fail to respect even the right to life. The extermination of millions of unborn children, in the name of the fight against poverty, actually constitutes the destruction of the poorest of all human beings. And yet it remains the case that . . . whole peoples have escaped from poverty despite experiencing substantial demographic growth. This goes to show that resources to solve the problem of poverty do exist, even in the face of an increasing population. Nor must it be forgotten that, since the end of the Second World War, the world's population has grown by four billion, largely because of certain countries that have recently emerged on the international scene as new economic powers, and have experienced rapid development specifically because of the large number of their inhabitants. Moreover, among the most developed nations, those with higher birth-rates enjoy better opportunities for development. In other words, population is proving to be an asset, not a factor that contributes to poverty" (no. 3).

Pandemic diseases deserve moral responses.

"Countries afflicted by [pandemic diseases, such as malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS] find themselves held hostage, when they try to address them, by those who make economic aid conditional upon the implementation of anti-life policies. . . First and foremost, educational campaigns are needed, aimed especially at the young, to promote a sexual ethic that fully corresponds to the dignity of the person; initiatives of this kind have already borne important fruits, causing a reduction in the spread of AIDS. Then, too, the necessary medicines and treatment must be made available to poorer peoples as well. This presupposes a determined effort to promote medical research and innovative forms of treatment, as well as flexible application, when required, of the international rules protecting intellectual property, so as to guarantee necessary basic healthcare to all people" (no. 4).



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Children are the most vulnerable victims.

"When poverty strikes a family, the children prove to be the most vulnerable victims: almost half of those living in absolute poverty today are children. To take the side of children when considering poverty means giving priority to those objectives which concern them most directly, such as caring for mothers, commitment to education, access to vaccines, medical care and drinking water, safeguarding the environment, and above all, commitment to defense of the family and the stability of relations within it. When the family is weakened, it is inevitably children who suffer. If the dignity of women and mothers is not protected, it is the children who are affected most" (no. 5).

Disarmament is necessary for development.

"An excessive increase in military expenditure risks accelerating the arms race, producing pockets of underdevelopment and desperation, so that it can paradoxically become a cause of instability, tension and conflict. As my venerable Predecessor Paul VI wisely observed, 'the new name for peace is development'. States are therefore invited to reflect seriously on the underlying reasons for conflicts, often provoked by injustice, and to practice courageous self-criticism. If relations can be improved, it should be possible to reduce expenditure on arms. The resources saved could then be earmarked for development projects to assist the poorest and most needy individuals and peoples: efforts expended in this way would be efforts for peace within the human family" (no. 6).

For the poorest countries, the food crisis is a "double marginalization."

"This [food] crisis is characterized not so much by a shortage of food, as by difficulty in gaining access to it and by different forms of speculation: in other words, by a structural lack of political and economic institutions capable of addressing needs and emergencies. Malnutrition can also cause grave mental and physical damage to the population, depriving many people of the energy necessary to escape from poverty unaided. This contributes to the widening gap of inequality, and can provoke violent reactions. All the indicators of relative poverty in recent years point to an increased disparity between rich and poor. No doubt the principal reasons for this are, on the one hand, advances in technology, which mainly benefit the more affluent, and on the other hand, changes in the prices of industrial products, which rise much faster than those of agricultural products and raw materials in the possession of poorer countries. In this way, the majority of the population in the poorest countries suffers a double marginalization, through the adverse effects of lower incomes and higher prices" (no. 7).

Globalization should benefit all.

"One of the most important ways of building peace is through a form of globalization directed towards the interests of the whole human family. In order to govern globalization, however, there needs to be a strong sense of global solidarity between rich and poor countries, as well as within individual countries, including affluent ones. A "common code of ethics" is also needed, consisting of norms based not upon mere consensus, but rooted in the natural law inscribed by the Creator on the conscience of every human being (cf. Rom 2:14-15). . . Effective means to redress the marginalization of the world's poor through globalization will only be found if people everywhere feel personally outraged by the injustices in the world and by the concomitant violations of human rights" (no. 8).

"As my venerable Predecessor Pope John Paul II had occasion to remark, globalization 'is notably ambivalent' and therefore needs to be managed with great prudence. This will include giving priority to the needs of the world's poor, and overcoming the scandal of the imbalance between the problems of poverty and the measures which have been adopted in order to address them. The imbalance lies both in the cultural and political order and in the spiritual and moral order" (no. 13).

"In today's globalized world, it is increasingly evident that peace can be built only if everyone is assured the possibility of reasonable growth: sooner or later, the distortions produced by unjust systems have to be paid for by everyone. It is utterly foolish to build a luxury home in the midst of desert or decay. Globalization on its own is incapable of building peace, and in many cases, it actually creates divisions and conflicts. If anything it points to a need: to be oriented towards a goal of profound solidarity that seeks the good of each and all. In this sense, globalization should be seen as a good opportunity to achieve something important in the fight

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against poverty, and to place at the disposal of justice and peace resources which were scarcely conceivable previously" (no. 14).

Poor countries should have equal access to the global market.

"In the field of international commerce and finance, there are processes at work today which permit a positive integration of economies, leading to an overall improvement in conditions, but there are also processes tending in the opposite direction, dividing and marginalizing peoples, and creating dangerous situations that can erupt into wars and conflicts. Since the Second World War, international trade in goods and services has grown extraordinarily fast. . . Yet there are other low-income countries which are still seriously marginalized in terms of trade. Their growth has been negatively influenced by the rapid decline, seen in recent decades, in the prices of commodities, which constitute practically the whole of their exports. . . Here I should like to renew an appeal for all countries to be given equal opportunities of access to the world market, without exclusion or marginalization" (no. 9).

Short-sighted financial policies have hurt everyone.

"The recent crisis demonstrates how financial activity can at times be completely turned in on itself, lacking any long-term consideration of the common good. This lowering of the objectives of global finance to the very short term reduces its capacity to function as a bridge between the present and the future, and as a stimulus to the creation of new opportunities for production and for work in the long term. Finance limited in this way to the short and very short term becomes dangerous for everyone, even for those who benefit when the markets perform well" (no. 10).

Ethical approaches are needed in the market and in policy.

"While it has been rightly emphasized that increasing per capita income cannot be the ultimate goal of political and economic activity, it is still an important means of attaining the objective of the fight against hunger and absolute poverty. . . If the poor are to be given priority, then there has to be enough room for an ethical approach to economics on the part of those active in the international market, an ethical approach to politics on the part of those in public office, and an ethical approach to participation capable of harnessing the contributions of civil society at local and international levels. International agencies themselves have come to recognize the value and advantage of economic initiatives taken by civil society or local administrations to promote the emancipation and social inclusion of those sectors of the population that often fall below the threshold of extreme poverty and yet are not easily reached by official aid"(no. 11-12).

We all have a role to play.

"In the Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II warned of the need to "abandon a mentality in which the poor - as individuals and as peoples - are considered a burden, as irksome intruders trying to consume what others have produced." The poor, he wrote, "ask for the right to share in enjoying material goods and to make good use of their capacity for work, thus creating a world that is more just and prosperous for all." (no. 14).

"Faithful to this summons from the Lord, the Christian community will never fail, then, to assure the entire human family of her support through gestures of creative solidarity, not only by 'giving from one's surplus', but above all by 'a change of life- styles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies.' At the start of the New Year, then, I extend to every disciple of Christ and to every person of good will a warm invitation to expand their hearts to meet the needs of the poor and to take whatever practical steps are possible in order to help them. The truth of the axiom cannot be refuted: 'to fight poverty is to build peace' (no. 15).

The Church has always been committed to the poor.

"The Church's social teaching has always been concerned with the poor. . . While attentively following the current phenomena of globalization and their impact on human poverty, the Church points out the new aspects of the social question, not only in their breadth but also in their depth, insofar as they concern man's identity and his relationship with God. These principles of social teaching tend to clarify the links between poverty and globalization and they help to guide action towards the building of peace. Among these principles, it is timely to recall in particular the "preferential love for the poor" (no. 15).

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