

A Knowledge Based Economy: The Response of the Catholic Social Tradition

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I would like to thank everyone who has given me the chance to take part in this conference. A special thank you to Michel Naughton who helped me stop, think and analyse important issues and also reawaken my conscience as a Christian.

When The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, gave his "Centesimus Annus" Encyclical on the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's "Rerum Novarum", He asked us to: "... look at the new things that surround us and the situations in which we find ourselves..... look at our uncertain yet promising future that calls to our sense of responsibility, like disciples of our Lord Jesus, so that we can follow the right path, proclaim the truth and tell everyone that He is the life ".

Inspired by the encyclical, a group of Catholic business people founded "Centesimus Annus - Pro Pontifice", in 1991. Its headquarters are in Vatican City, but it is also able to conduct its business elsewhere.

The Foundation statute clearly states that: "The aim of the Foundation is to spread the Christian, social, ethical and human values set out in the "Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice" encyclical, of which the Pope is guarantor. The initiative intends to create a new business culture; business men and women will be able to instil their company with new life....

And there will be no shortage of incentives for their business.

The foundation's leaflets are currently available.

".....once land was the key to production, later it was capital. Today people are the key, people and their capacity for knowledge, developed by science, their organisational skills....."

Only with knowledge can we give substance to all the needs written in the "Centesimus Annus"; a true sign of the great responsibility we have as Christians. In order to encourage real development "the skills of our workers have to grow, business people have to be efficient and aware of their duties.....". our one fundamental obligation is that

we have to be responsible. Each of us must have their own responsibility, in a long chain in which each link, big or small, is just as important as the others.

In fact "... globalisation of the economy would have very positive results if supported by a strong sense of importance and dignity for all people, and if the well-being of the world were a concept shared equally by everyone". Those are the words with which the Pope addressed the participants of the meeting organised by the "Centesimus Annus" Foundation, for the Audience on the morning of Saturday 11th September 1999, in Castel Gandolfo. "The Jubilee year is an invitation to make your own specific, qualified contribution.

We hope that the Jubilee will help us build a new culture of solidarity and international co-operation, in which everyone - especially rich countries - can assume their responsibilities and create an economic model that will benefit everyone".

What is more, we were invited to organise the world day for Financial Operators (1 May 2000), in Vatican City. This event was preceded by an international meeting about "Ethics and Economics", in February 2000 and by another study day on 30 April 2000. These two days were attended by many important names from the world of finance, such as Mr. Michel Camdessus, ex-director of the International Monetary Fund, Prof. Mario Monti, and other University professor from all over the world. Ethics, finance and every aspect of globalisation were discussed, and a sense of duty to work and life was reawakened in all the participants. We have to be responsible when we act and realise what our obligations are. The incredible contribution made by technology is an excellent reason to be optimistic.....

In fact today our knowledge is much greater because of technology. I would like to tell you a story that I heard during the Labour day meeting on 1st May. Two people were writing to each other. One lived in a rich country and wrote with a new pen on elegant paper, and his letters were beautifully written; the other lived in a poor country and sent rough pieces of ink-stained paper that were difficult to read. As time went by, each person's writing tools became more advanced. The first wrote with a hi-tech computer, which produced wonderful results; the other continued to hand-write his letters with paper and ink that, although still shoddy, were an improvement on before. One day the person in the rich country decided to buy his friend a computer. But when he received a letter.....he couldn't read it. He was amazed! The software he had installed on his friend's computer was even more sophisticated than his own. He had been unexpectedly overtaken by his friend. This is an optimistic tale which I hope will get a message across: today everything is possible; all we have to do is want it badly enough!

The Foundation's participants aim put into practice the skills they learnt at these meetings, doing so in many ways as they go about their daily business.

So, now I want to speak about an important and concrete experience: a school, the first Italian school with particular characteristics.

The School of Ethics and Economics was founded by one of the participants on this principle. To demonstrate the responsibility that everyone has and the new culture of solidarity and international co-operation, about which the Pope spoke, the foundation wants to ensure that people are at the centre of every economy.

This School is about modern economics, and "A KNOWLEDGE BASED ECONOMY". Its most important resource is people. The donations that fund the school are viewed as an investment in the future of the world's economy. The "Ethics and Economics" Foundation is an educational body founded to train people with decision-making skills and commitment motivated by social and economic improvement, in the belief that there is a close link between human values and economic policy which can bring benefits for humanity. The foundation is the result of the meeting and collaboration between civil, cultural and economic bodies in north-east Italy " (from the Foundation's Statute). The north-east is considered the engine-room of the Italian economy because of its economic model.

The School was created in 1995, in Bassano del Grappa, Vicenza, by company owners, freelance workers and professors at "Ca' Foscari" University, Venice, and is the first of its kind in Italy. Its aims are:

1. to reduce the difference between the wealth of the North and the poverty of the South;
2. to run economic activities based on ethics.

3) to make choices to benefit humanity.

Today the Foundation works in Italy (mainly in the north-east); in Europe (France, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic); the Far East (Thailand); Africa (Namibia, Mozambique, Madagascar); the United States (New York); Latin America (Brazil, Venezuela, Peru).

It plans to achieve its aims with:

1. A permanent course on "Company Economics and Ethics". Duration: 213 days – 71 days). This course is only for company executives and students who also work.
2. A seminar for business-people on sociological, company and economic issues.
3. International Conferences (Prague – 1993; Cracovia – 1994; Bassano – 1995; Budapest – 1996; New York – 1997; Mahajanga Madagascar – 1999).
4. A Masters in "Company Economics and Ethics" with the Law department at LUMSA University, Rome.
5. Suggestions such as:
 - a. a work exchange for personnel, to reduce the North – South divide. This will be achieved through "open-door companies" who want to share assets, services and business expertise with other parts of the world. Companies in north-east Italy are

- the cornerstone of this idea. There are three types of company involved: 1) companies that intend to host young people and then set-up companies in the country of origin; 2) companies that are not completely sure about investing in the country of origin, but are willing to assess the options; 3) companies only interested in hosting young people in order to give them experience.
- b. self-sustaining villages specifically created for the employees, to combat waste and welfarism. The company-village of Mahajanga was founded on 16 October 1999, less than a year ago. It covers an area of 20,000 square metres.
 - c. creating schools of "Ethics and Economics" around the world; the main aim is to learn Italian, with special attention paid to company life. Video-cassettes will be distributed in local standard. The knowledge and fundamental concepts behind the permanent course, "Company Economics and Ethics", will be described by video-cassettes to prepare the young people for their time in Italy.
 - d. technologically connecting all associated schools, companies and other interested parties.
- All these projects are currently active in Italy, Lithuania, and Madagascar. Other parts of the world have reacted very positively and much interest has been created.

We have attempted to make this organisation a tangible example of Christian action and responsibility. You are all very welcome to get involved with this organisation to develop new projects or to contribute to current ones. It could be a way of expanding this organisation which has sparked off so much interest. Please come and see me if you are at all interested and I will do my best to help.

I believe I have given you two good examples of Christians taking action and acting positively. The first example is about personal awareness and the second about important plans.

I would like to finish my speech by asking you, my listeners (or my readers), a question, to which I hope you can give me an answer. Do we feel responsible as Christians? And what efforts are we making to spread our values? Could we give something extra? I look forward to the replies, which I will elaborate on to find some answers.

I would like to thank everyone who takes part and contributes to my report.