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Reigns without Justice («Regna sine iustitia»)

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REIGNS WITHOUT JUSTICE (*REGNA SINE IUSTITIA*)

Abstract. Both in the past and in the current period of human history we encounter similar problems: public lies, existential and economical destabilization, military conflicts, religious and spiritual confusion etc. As in St. Augustine's time, today we, the modern Christians, are amidst all this turmoil also facing the challenge of how to make this world a better place to live while staying focused on the eternal and supreme Good – God himself. In a time of contemporary economic and financial crises, when many people face the threat of losing their jobs and experiencing many humiliating forms of social injustice, the Church through its leaders and thinkers is reminding us of the importance of the elementary principles of its social doctrine, as well as the universal moral norms and values that need to be exercised in the public life of the human family, as well as the personal lives of individuals. Every crisis is caused by the abandoning of morality and therefore the solution to any crisis requires our return to the timeless dimensions of truth and ethics.

Keywords: common good, social injustice, solidarity, subsidiarity, universal moral norms

1. Introduction. 2. Pain of falsehood and injustice and the light of truth and hope in Augustine's times. 3. Pain of falsehood and injustice and the light of truth and hope in our days. 4. Principle of a common good. 5. Principle of solidarity. 6. Principle of subsidiarity. 7. Epilogue.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Justice being taken away, then, what are kingdoms but great robberies? For what are robberies themselves, but little kingdoms?¹ The band itself is made up of men; it is ruled by the authority of a prince, it is knit together by the pact of the confederacy; the booty divided according to the law agreed upon. If, by the admittance of abandoned men, this evil increases to such a degree that it holds places, fixes abodes, takes possession of cities, and subdues peoples, it assumes more plainly the name of a kingdom, because reality is now manifestly conferred upon it, not by the removal of covetousness, but by the addition of impunity. Indeed, that was an apt and true reply, which was given to Alexander the Great by a pirate, who had been seized. For when that king had asked the man what he meant by keeping hostile possession of the sea, he answered with bold pride: What you mean by seizing the whole earth; but because I do it with a petty ship, I am called a robber, while you who does it with a great fleet are styled emperor”².

Maybe the title of this lecture seems dark and pessimistic, however the goal of my contribution is to illustrate how necessary it is to not just perceive an unpleasant part of reality but to also see the seeds of hope and to have no doubts that all people of good will are invited to become a light in darkness. I will try to present this through the ideas of St. Augustine, representing the first period of history of Christianity, as well as the thoughts of the best-known modern Christian thinkers and leaders like John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

2. PAIN OF FALSEHOOD AND INJUSTICE AND THE LIGHT OF TRUTH AND HOPE IN AUGUSTINE’S TIMES

By what was described by St. Augustine centuries ago, it seems that history frequently repeats itself. When Augustine wrote about injustice in this world it was a time of turmoil for the Roman Empire, at least its

¹ In Latin: “Remota itaque iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia”. Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*, IV, 4.

² Augustinus, *Boží štát I (De civitate Dei)*, Bratislava 2005, 117.

western part. The Empire and Rome itself were attacked by barbarian tribes (Alarich). The people of Rome, always so proud of “Roma aeterna”, were shocked. Their famous city, once the organizer of invasions and military campaigns to neighboring countries and nations, was now under attack and being invaded. Who was to blame? Who was guilty of bringing about this situation? Augustine, once an opponent and now proponent of Christianity was deeply touched by the reproaches of the pagan citizens, accusing the Christians of being responsible for this state of affairs. Previously, when people had worshipped the pagan gods and idols, Rome had been rich, powerful and secure. Now after so many people had abandoned their previous faith, they were weak, vulnerable and afflicted with many disasters, poverty, failures and defeats. Augustine reminded them of something that was unusual even for the Romans and the Greeks. The bloodthirsty barbarians spared not only the property but also the lives of the Roman citizens who hid in the Christian churches and basilicas, irrespective of whether they were Christians or pagans. They respected the sacred character of these places and Augustine senses the power of Christ’s name in that³.

On the other hand, the Romans, in spite of their pride in their own civilization, did not follow this example during their invasions⁴. He reminded them that Rome’s decline had started long before and, surprisingly, at times of peace when they felt carefree, careless and started to engage in immoral acts that weakened them⁵. “For cruel and disgusting morals before Christ’s coming the State became the worst and the most shameful it is not considered by Romans as the work of their gods. But for the tribulations, that they experienced in these time as a punishment for their pride and sensuality they blame the Christian religion”⁶. And it was this very religion that taught people “how to live their earthly lives in the effort to deserve eternal beatitude”⁷.

³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

He encouraged them to refuse false and cheating gods if they wanted to experience the splendor of true freedom⁸. Now that they were frustrated by the diminished power of their reign, he reminded them, almost with irony, how questionable it was rejoice in the old glory and greatness of their empire, since it was nothing more than the result of injustice and the iniquity of their enemies that had helped Rome grow⁹. When he compared the Romans with their cultural rivals he said that the Greeks presented their gods in their plays in a more decent manner. The Roman idols lacked the power to save or expand the Empire. He suggested that if they served the only true God, according his commandment, perhaps they would retain their empire and, even if they were to lose it, they would obtain a much better life in the eternal empire of heaven¹⁰.

Then Augustine said something that irritates people to this very day – he mentioned the destructive reality of sin and he specifically emphasized the dimension of the first (original) sin when people discovered they were able to disobey God. “It is devastating for the creation to fulfill his own will and not the will of the one who created him”¹¹. In that period of history, so humiliating for Rome and its people terrified by the wars, conflicts and unrest, Augustine found peace in the well-mannered harmony of the body and soul and harmony between God and people. “God the Teacher teaches us two fundamental commandments: commandment of love to God and commandment of love to neighbors in which the man finds the triple subject of love (God, human being himself and other people). The one who loves God is certainly not lost in love to himself”¹².

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 132.

¹¹ Augustinus, *Boží štát II (De civitate Dei)*, Bratislava 2005, 23.

¹² *Ibid.*

3. PAIN OF FALSEHOOD AND INJUSTICE AND THE LIGHT OF TRUTH AND HOPE IN OUR DAYS

What troubled Augustine in ancient times was a pain that has run throughout all human history, right up until now. However, there is a difference between something wrong that happens unexpectedly, accidentally and unintentionally or something that is predictable and a natural result of the wrong actions of human beings. Even worse is someone, who does not want to acknowledge his responsibility and guilt and tries to blame others for his own misconduct. Usually, we think that now when we have made such progress in almost all areas, we are much better equipped and prepared to resolve a variety of crises. One of the most frequently discussed crises in the contemporary world is the global economic and financial crisis. Therefore, based on some of the views St. Augustine expressed in his famous book, *De Civitate Dei*, I will demonstrate the connections between his ideas and those of the modern Christian doctrine on the issues of Social Ethics, especially as put forward by John Paul II in the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* and Benedict XVI.

There is a story about three men who were working in a quarry. They were doing the same job but obviously with very different understandings of their activities: “What are you doing?” The first man replied: “I am breaking these stones and rocks into smaller pieces”. The second one answered: “I need some money so I am here doing this job”. And the third man replied: “I am here to break and crush these stones and then they transport this material to nearby village to build new houses there”. People might have different understanding of meaning their work. For some of them it is just an opportunity to occupy themselves, to avoid boredom, and maintain and develop their skills and muscles. Some others just need some a means to survive. However, as in the case of the third man, there are also those who see in their work a chance to create something whereby they realize their human genius, and dignity. For those religiously formed people, work and their creative activities provide the chance to approach God the Creator. At the beginning of the month of May, people in many countries celebrate May Day (also know as International Workers Day), while on

some other continents they celebrate Labor Day (in a different season). Though some of these feasts have their roots in extreme leftist movements of the 19th century, the Church recognizes the huge and positive impact of work on human beings and welcomes even the regular and ordinary work, jobs and activities as a means of sanctification of men, in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth and the humble life he spent in a workshop with his guardian, St. Joseph the carpenter. Though hard work was considered as a punishment for people after they succumbed to temptation, gave into sin, and thereby were denied entry to Paradise, it was also God's will that people take care of this Earth.

And later, moved by the example of Jesus, the monks of St. Benedict lived according to their regula *Ora et Labora!* (*Pray and work!*). For them work was a different type of liturgy to worship God. In these years of global crises, unemployment has dangerously increased, not only in many parts of Europe, but throughout the whole world, and people unemployment is still on the rise with more and more people losing their jobs, rather than finding employment. Many of them feel humiliated by this experience, not just because they and their families have to struggle for survival, but also because they had felt that the work had enriched them, even if it hadn't been their preferred occupation. Without it they now feel useless. It is for this reason that I wish to recall the three principles that form not just the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church but also provide the means for the sound organization of human society: the Principle of a Common Good, the Principle of Solidarity and the Principle of Subsidiarity.

4. PRINCIPLE OF A COMMON GOOD

There is always a danger that the State will serve the interests of minority groups and ignore the legitimate interests of the majority. Totalitarian regimes and dictatorships, where the government or a leader does not serve the people, but rather goes as far as to persecute them for and in their real needs, are particularly distressing¹³. The reason

¹³ "However, those political systems, prevailing in some parts of the world are to be reproved which hamper civic or religious freedom, victimize large numbers through

why the common good is called common is that it reflects the elementary dignity of all people and helps in what they all have in common. We are not just speaking of Good in ontological terms, but morally. According to Jacques Maritain, morally speaking, we make a distinction between these types of good:

- Honest good (*bonum honestum*) – good in itself, not done as a result of some other good or in preparation for, or as means to achieve something good later
- Useful good – using good means aimed at higher level of good as our goal in the future
- Pleasant good – as a result of something good experienced in the past¹⁴.

There is always a temptation to reduce good to something that fits the criterions of so popular pragmatism or utilitarianism. We can see this danger in politics when political leaders, led by a desire not to lose their voters, are more interested in what people want and expect than what is really for the long-termed benefit of all. Such populism can be fatal and later it is the people, who have to bear the consequences of such an approach, and not the politicians themselves. Here we can see the parallel between good leaders and parents. They know that sometimes it is necessary to say “no” to their children if they want to raise them with a sense of responsibility.

5. PRINCIPLE OF SOLIDARITY

The nature of human beings is deeply social. Therefore, there is a strong desire inside all humans to be close to others. This is also an expression of necessity to develop mutual understanding and cooperation. If such co-habitation of people is organized into groups directed by law, it is called society. If it is directed by love, it is called commu-

avarice and political crimes, and divert the exercise of authority from the service of the common good to the interests of one or another faction or of the rulers themselves”. *Gaudium et spes (Pastoral Constitution)*, Vatican Council II, Rome 1968, 73.

¹⁴ Cf. H. Hrehová, *Morálna filozofia Jacquesa Maritaina. Reflexie o etike a morálke*, Trnava 2011, 76.

nion¹⁵. “Solidarity is (...) an authentic moral virtue, not a “feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. That is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all”¹⁶. In Social Philosophy, the *solidarism* is defined as an effort to support cooperation between people because of their mutual connections and mutual dependence¹⁷.

Therefore the process and trends, such as globalization around the world and integration in Europe, are inevitable and whether they turn out well or badly depends on people and their intentions – whether good or bad. The abovementioned Compendium says on this topic: “In the presence of the phenomenon of interdependence and its constant expansion, however, there persist in every part of the world stark inequalities between developed and developing countries, inequalities stoked also by various forms of exploitation, oppression and corruption that have a negative influence on the internal and international life of many States. The acceleration of interdependence between persons and peoples needs to be accompanied by equally intense efforts on the ethical-social plane, in order to avoid the dangerous consequences of perpetrating injustice on a global scale. This would have very negative repercussions even in the very countries that are presently more advantaged”¹⁸.

6. PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY

The term subsidiarity, derived from the Latin *subsidium* (assistance, help), is closely related to solidarity. While solidarity primarily focuses on mutual cooperation between individuals as well as other different entities, which are basically (but not necessarily) on the same level,

¹⁵ Cf. E. Coreth, *Co je člověk?*, Praha 1994, 166.

¹⁶ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Rome 2004, 193.

¹⁷ Cf. Š. Kováč, *Pro sacerdote*, Topolčany 1999, 145.

¹⁸ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, op. cit., 192.

subsidiarity describes the relationships between lower and higher entities. „Subsidiarity, understood in the positive sense as economic, institutional or juridical assistance offered to lesser social entities, entails a corresponding series of negative implications that require the State to refrain from anything that would de facto restrict the existential space of the smaller essential cells of society. Their initiative, freedom and responsibility must not be supplanted”. Practically, because naturally the authorities do not like to give up their power, competencies or influence in favor of someone else, this principle assumes a strong attachment to the principle of the common good¹⁹. If we wanted to apply this principle to the systems, which were typical of a bi-polar world divided for decades, we could say that while the principle of solidarity protects people from individualism (typical in capitalism) this principle of subsidiarity protects individuals or smaller groups of people from the collectivism typical of the Marxist and Communist ideologies.

This last remark could give rise to the opinion that these three principles are somehow “artificially” balanced in an effort to remain neutral in the social conflicts of the world. However, as has documented by John Paul II and Benedict XVI, these principles really create balance, not “diplomatically” but rather in terms of avoiding extreme solution or recognizing certain social evils as status quo. Both spiritual leaders and thinkers are influenced by the doctrine of their predecessors, who also developed the three principles, which became the Magna Carta of the social teachings of the Catholic Church.

During his pontificate John Paul II dedicated three major documents (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, *Laborem exercens* and *Centesimus annus*) and many other minor documents and speeches to the issue of social justice as well as social doctrine. Let us not forget, he became Pope in the harsh years of neo-stalinism, when his native Poland was still a communist country fighting with the non-communist union leaders and members. For him to compose the encyclical *Centesimus annus* was far more than simply an act of writing an official document.

¹⁹ Cf. Š. Kováč, op. cit., 277.

In many aspects it also reflected his personal experience. We will focus on John Paul II as a man who was leading the Church at a time when people expected liberation from the totalitarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. In *Centesimus annus* he analyzed the reason for the fall of Marxist ideas and warned people against over-enthusiasm based upon the false hope that Capitalism is better. “We have seen that it is unacceptable to say that the defeat of so-called Real Socialism leaves capitalism as the only model of economic organization. It is necessary to break down the barriers and monopolies which leave so many countries on the margins of development, and to provide all individuals and nations with the basic conditions which will enable them to share in development”²⁰.

The system based on Marxism presented itself as a protector of the working class and taught that liberation from any kind of exploitation is only possible via the revolutionary fight and class war. Those who were supposed to be protected did not experience social liberation and, unlike their teachers, they preferred a peaceful approach to dialogue and negotiation on how to change the existing system²¹. This is certainly the way that, even in the other countries and on other continents, people can learn from this experience. Especially in Latin America, where even some priests and theologians who support the *Theology of Liberation* (*Teología de liberación*) and in a desperate effort to improve the social conditions of the poor, need to remember that a bloody revolution resolves basically nothing and destroys almost everything.

In Slovakia (or the former Czechoslovakia), in Poland and other countries of this region, many people believed they were going to build something new where truth, justice, freedom, welfare and good would prevail. But shortly after 1989, they noticed that things were somehow headed in a different direction. Now the many words, suggestions and warnings of John Paul II seem almost prophetic. We were afraid that a critical view of the new system would encourage those gripped by nostalgia that communism was better. The Pope was not afraid to say:

²⁰ Ján Pavol II, *Centesimus annus*, Trnava 1995, no. 35.

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 22–23.

“The Church acknowledges the legitimate role of profit as an indication that a business is functioning well. When a firm makes a profit, this means that productive factors have been properly employed and corresponding human needs have been duly satisfied. But profitability is not the only indicator of a firm’s condition. It is possible for the financial accounts to be in order, and yet for the people — who make up the firm’s most valuable asset — to be humiliated and their dignity offended”²². When the social differences amongst people started to grow, those who believed in the universal power of the free market were reminded that “there are many human needs which find no place on the market. It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental human needs to remain unsatisfied, and not to allow those burdened by such needs to perish”²³. And also referring those poorer countries, known at that time as the third world, he spoke of the “fourth world” – where people live in a relatively rich country, but are marginalized by society²⁴.

Many of these thoughts went unnoticed or ignored. Now, as we face the global economical and financial crisis, we see how dangerous it is not to heal old wounds and create new ones. If moral doctrine, ethical norms and morality seem to be just some kind of add-on, or an optional extra (so to speak), sooner or later we will learn that morality and ethics are not just theory.

Though the pontificate of the Pope Benedict XVI was much shorter than that of John Paul II and also in a different spiritual and ideological climate, both of them went through certain breaking points. With John Paul II we associate the year 1989, including both our hopes and disillusion when we realized that it is easy to change a system but not the human heart. Unlike the painful and as yet unaccomplished transformation of the former Eastern Bloc, we now face a crisis that afflicts a major part of the world irrespective of geographical or ideological boundaries. Benedict XVI wrote an Encyclical focused on the virtue of Love, *Deus Caritas est*, and later – in the midst of the crisis – *Ca-*

²² Ibid., no. 35.

²³ Ibid., no. 34.

²⁴ Cf. Ibid., no. 33.

ritas in veritate. He also looked back to those times when, in the 19th century, the church was accused by the radical leftists of helping the old system to survive, to justify it and try to present it as more humane, through its charitable activities and organizations.

Benedict XVI acknowledged that there is some partial truth as well as a large error in some people's thinking that poverty can be eliminated by a system based on social justice and not by giving the alms. "It is true that the pursuit of justice must be a fundamental norm of the State and that the aim of a just social order is to guarantee to each person, according to the principle of subsidiarity, his share of the community's goods"²⁵. But at the same time he adds: "Love—*caritas* will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of the neighbor is indispensable. The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person – every person – needs: namely, loving personal concern"²⁶.

At this point, it is timely to mention that under Communism (Real Socialism) the male religious orders were forbidden and declared illegal; their monasteries closed and ruined. The nuns were allowed to stay in some hospitals or nursing homes. It is very interesting that some of the communist bosses, especially those at a local level, wished to be taken care of by nuns. This also proves that even professional care offered in the name of justice cannot be compared with the care based on genuine love. At a time when so many believed that the contemporary world's economy has been set up so that there is no way to escape these structures of sin, Benedict XVI believed there is a way to civilize the economy: "Charity in truth, in this case, requires that sha-

²⁵ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, Trnava 2006, no. 26.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 28.

pe and structure be given to those types of economic initiative which, without rejecting profit, aim at a higher goal than the mere logic of the exchange of equivalents, of profit as an end in itself”²⁷. It requires some courage, but it is necessary to practice human values like friendship, mutual trust and solidarity within economic activities and not outside of them²⁸, all the while remembering “business activity has a human significance, prior to its professional one”²⁹.

7. EPILOGUE

St. Augustine says that kingdoms without justice are nothing but large robberies. The Christian social doctrine, which is based on reason and natural law that is in accordance with the nature of the human being, offers assistance to the State. Many come to see that contemporary crises do not only have economic but also moral backgrounds – a lack of sensitivity to ethics and moral norms. Our task is to avoid the naive optimism that one day we will develop a system to immediately resolve all the problems of the world. Furthermore we cannot remain fatalistic and believe nothing can change. If many of these evils started in the human heart – in pride, egoism, discrimination or hatred, then the opposite way is possible – to practice on the personal level the virtues of modesty, humility, self-restraint and self-discipline, altruism, consciousness, personal and public involvement. And even at this time of turmoil we come to the same conclusion that St. Augustine once did: a love for God and one’s neighbors is the best panacea for the many ailments of this world.

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²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 36.

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