

“Catholic Social Thought: Strengthening Global Governance and Overcoming Polarizations”

**Speech of His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin
to the International Conference of the
Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation**

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Dear Friends,

It is a pleasure to meet you the participants in the International Conference of the *Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice* Foundation and to share with you some thoughts on how Catholic Social Doctrine can contribute to strengthening global governance and overcoming the polarizations that fracture our world.

In an era marked by division—political, cultural, and ideological—we stand at a crossroads. Global challenges like climate change, economic inequality, migration, and technological developments such as AI demand cooperation, yet mistrust and fragmentation often prevail. Catholic Social Thought, rooted in the Gospel and centuries of reflection, offers a timeless framework to navigate these challenges, fostering unity and effective governance without sacrificing truth or justice.

Let me begin by outlining what Catholic Social Thought is. It is not a political ideology or a rigid dogma but a dynamic tradition of principles drawn from Scripture, Church teaching, and human reason. It seeks to apply the Gospel to social, economic, and political realities, emphasizing the dignity of every human person, the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, and care for creation. These principles are not exclusive to Catholics; they speak to universal human aspirations and provide a moral compass for building just societies.

Strengthening Global Governance

First, let's consider global governance. The term evokes images of international institutions like the United Nations or agreements on trade and climate. Yet governance is more than bureaucracy - it's about ordering human societies toward justice, peace, and flourishing. Today, global governance faces a crisis of legitimacy. Many feel it is either too intrusive, overriding national sovereignty, or too weak,

failing to address pressing issues like poverty or conflict. Catholic Social Thought offers three key contributions to strengthen it.

1. Human Dignity as the Foundation

At the heart of Catholic Social Thought is the belief that every person is created in the image of God, endowed with inalienable dignity. This principle challenges systems that reduce people to economic units or political pawns. In global governance, it calls for policies that prioritize the most vulnerable - refugees, the poor, the elderly, the unborn - over power or profit. For example, when negotiating climate agreements, human dignity demands we consider not just emissions targets but the farmers displaced by drought or the communities submerged by rising seas. By grounding governance in dignity, we ensure it serves people, not abstract ideals or elite interests.

2. The Common Good as the Goal

The common good - the conditions that allow all to flourish - is a cornerstone of Catholic teaching. Unlike utilitarianism, which maximizes aggregate happiness, or individualism, which prioritizes personal gain, the common good balances individual rights with collective responsibilities. In global governance, this means moving beyond zero-sum thinking. Trade wars, vaccine hoarding, or resource exploitation harm the common good by pitting nations against each other. Catholic Social Thought urges cooperation, encouraging institutions to foster mutual benefit. Imagine a world where debt relief for poorer nations is seen not as charity but as a shared investment in global stability.

3. Subsidiarity and Solidarity in Balance

Subsidiarity teaches that decisions should be made at the most local level possible, respecting the agency of individuals and communities. Solidarity, meanwhile, calls us to stand with others, especially the marginalized, across borders. Together, they offer a blueprint for governance that is neither top-down nor fragmented. Subsidiarity critiques global institutions that overreach, stifling local cultures or economies. Solidarity challenges isolationism, reminding us that no nation is an island. For instance, migration policies should empower local communities to integrate newcomers while ensuring global cooperation to address root causes like war or poverty. This balance prevents governance from becoming either authoritarian or ineffective.

Overcoming Polarizations

Now, let's turn to polarization. Whether it's populism versus globalism, tradition versus progress, or left versus right, our world is riven by "us versus them" mentalities. Social media amplifies this, turning debates into battlegrounds. Polarization erodes trust, paralyzes decision-making, and fuels conflict. Catholic Social Thought offers a path to reconciliation, not by erasing differences but by transcending them.

1. Truth and Dialogue

Catholic teaching insists on the pursuit of truth, but it pairs this with humility and dialogue. In a polarized world, people cling to their version of truth, dismissing others as enemies. Catholic Social Thought invites us to listen without compromising conviction. Pope Francis's encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* calls for a "culture of encounter," where dialogue seeks understanding, not victory. Imagine applying this to debates over globalization: instead of demonizing either free markets or protectionism, we could explore how both can serve human flourishing.

2. Solidarity as a Bridge

Solidarity is not just a slogan; it's a call to recognize our shared humanity. Polarization thrives on division - rich versus poor, native versus migrant, secular versus religious. Solidarity dismantles these walls by reminding us that we are interconnected. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, wealthier nations stockpiled vaccines while poorer ones scrambled. Solidarity would have prioritized equitable access, not out of guilt but because a healthy world benefits all. By emphasizing shared destiny, Catholic Social Thought heals divides that polarization exploits.

3. Care for Creation as Common Ground

Environmental crises offer a unique opportunity to overcome polarization. Climate change doesn't care about borders or ideologies - it affects us all. Catholic Social Thought, especially through the encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, frames care for creation as a moral imperative rooted in stewardship. This resonates across divides: conservatives value tradition and responsibility, progressives champion justice and innovation. By rallying around our shared home, we can move past ideological gridlock. Joint efforts - like reforestation or renewable energy - build trust and show that collaboration is possible.

Conclusion

As I close, let me return to the heart of Catholic Social Thought: the belief that every person matters, that we are called to live as brothers and sisters, and that our world is a gift to be cherished. Global governance is not just about systems - it's about building a civilization of love. Polarization is not inevitable - it can be overcome through truth, solidarity, and shared purpose.

Catholic Social Thought doesn't offer quick fixes or utopian promises. It offers something better: a vision of humanity at its best, working together for the common good in the light of the Gospel. In a fractured world, it reminds us that unity is not uniformity, and justice is not vengeance. As Pope Leo said in his first speech, it is all about building "bridges through dialogue and encounter, joining together as one people, always at peace".¹ Let us draw on this wisdom to strengthen governance and heal divisions, creating a future where all can thrive.

Thank you, and may God bless our shared journey.

¹ Pope Leo XIV, First blessing "*Urbi et Orbi*", 8 May 2025.