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Social Justice and Evangelization (Part 2)

Interview With Cardinal Peter Turkson

By Jason Adkins

ST. PAUL, Minnesota, NOV. 3, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The Church's social doctrine is not only a font of principles on which to construct a good and just society, it is also a means of evangelization.

That's the message of Peter Cardinal Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Citing the biblical story of Zaccheus, he believes the truths of the Church's social tradition are a preparation for grace and invite an encounter with the Lord.

Turkson has served as chancellor of the Catholic University College of Ghana and president of the Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference. He has also served on a range of pontifical commissions, councils and committees, and Benedict XVI named him president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in October 2009.

He was recently in St. Paul, Minnesota, visiting the University of St. Thomas, where he delivered the annual Habiger lecture sponsored by the Center for Catholic Studies. The lecture was entitled, "Caritas in Veritate: Good News for Society."

In an interview with ZENIT, Turkson discussed the first fruits of "Caritas in Veritate," as well as explained why the Holy See needs to remain a voice of conscience at the United Nations.

[Part 1](#) of this interview appeared Tuesday.

ZENIT: What effect is the Church's social teaching having on business leaders and society?

Cardinal Turkson: People are excited about the Church's tradition. Many have discovered the place of God in Christ, showing that the Church's social doctrine is a tool for evangelization.

For instance, in the Gospel story of Zaccheus, he was a tax collector. He was enriching himself at the expense of others. But when he met Jesus he undergoes a transformation. He says, "If I cheated anybody, I now pay them back."

How come before he met Jesus, he did not see that what he was doing was cheating people?

The story of Zaccheus shows that when you have a certain encounter with the Lord, it makes a change in us.

In the same way people may have to come to have a certain experience of the Lord. They must realize that business cannot be as usual. It cannot trample on another human being; it cannot trample on another.

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Instead, business must lead to the integral development of the human person. The pursuit of human progress cannot be one which is oblivious to the communitarian character of the human person.

This encyclical "Caritas in Veritate" talks about human development that must be integral and whole. It invites us to rediscover human development and human progress.

Q: Looking at the development of the Church's social tradition, it appears that what marked the earlier papal encyclicals, from Pope Leo XIII's "Rerum Novarum" to John XXIII's "Mater et Magistra," was the application of Thomistic philosophy to the problems of the day. As a result, there seemed to be a clearer program of political action that Catholics could rally behind. More recent encyclicals, however, seem to bear a more personal theological or philosophical stamp of the pope who wrote them, and there is also more dispute as to how to apply the teachings contained within. Does the Church need to return to a more rigorous Thomism in its approach to the social questions of the day?

Cardinal Turkson: Let me put it this way. This particular Pope is credited with the formulation of a hermeneutic of continuity. That hermeneutic does not just apply to the issue of Vatican II and prior ecumenical councils, but also to the continuity between the recent papal social teaching and that of prior popes.

Naturally, the change of context requires that the emphasis be put differently. Sometimes the formulation of certain issues gets framed differently. But there is true continuity.

When this Pope talks about Tradition, it is everything we talked about in the past.

It was not ultimately Thomism that provided the point of departure for the Church's social teaching, but Scripture itself. Thomism was a way of articulating the principles found in the Bible.

I'm not sure we need to go back to Thomas for a clear formulation.

It is likely that a certain tradition within the Church, going by catechisms with their questions and answers, created a particular approach to issues. Sometimes, Thomism is helpful in that context.

But it should not exclude the desire to be discursive about issues. And that new encyclical gets us toward that.

The encyclicals are written to all people of good will. With that purpose in mind, you cannot necessarily present the teaching in a catechetical, Thomistic type of manner.

The discursive style does not move away from Thomism, but rather enriches the tradition.

It is aimed at a larger audience to whom the encyclicals are addressed. That accounts for the move away from a clear, Thomistic format.

ZENIT: Often, those involved in articulating the Church's position in the public square, using natural law or some other argument, run up against a brick wall. The arguments can be made cogently, over and over, but they do not appear to stick. It seems we would just be better off proclaiming Jesus as Lord and leaving it at that because ultimately, the solution to social, political, and economic problems both locally and globally requires a real solidarity between peoples that depends on the recognition of the fatherhood of God. In this regard, would a rediscovery of the now-forgotten idea of the social kingship of Christ -- his lordship over all things, including the political and economic order -- be helpful?

Cardinal Turkson: This is perfectly in order. This may be a way of approaching the problem.

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The Holy Father says the truth of reason and truth of faith are not opposed. But the truth of reason is invited to transcendence.

The things of the truth of reason are not a final point of arrival. The truth of faith should transcend the truth of reason.

Natural law of itself is a preparation for the order of grace.

We need to recognize the vocation of reason as ordered to transcendence, the figure of Jesus as God incarnate.

When that is the case, we can refer to what the recent encyclical talks about.

The one book of nature shows God as the author of his creation but also everything that belongs to it.

Thus, he becomes the lord of all things, including the relationships of the human person.

There is a tendency in the world to look to the person as the author of himself, or as made by the culture and outside forces.

This is an attempt to replace God and do away with God.

In light of that, Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI remind us that without transcendence life is meaningless and cannot attain its own goals.

The need for the kingship of Jesus is precisely because he is the revelation of the Father. It is needed to present the vocation of reason as a vocation to transcendence.

It is a truth revealed by Christ and in Christ.

So natural law is not a point of arrival, but each person is invited to transcendence to discover themselves in the finality of the truth of Jesus. They discover the Father's plan in the truth of creation.

That invitation to transcendence exists, and becomes the subject matter of the Church's evangelizing mission. We talk about the truth of reason, but we do not stop there.

It must discover itself in Jesus as the revelation of the Father.

ZENIT: When you speak to bodies such as the United Nations, as you did in September about the Millennium Development Goals, and exhort them in their activities to uphold and build a culture of life, does it seem as though the message is getting through?

Cardinal Turkson: I think there are a lot of things to be discovered about how the United Nations works.

The United Nations by itself is supposed to be a meeting of sovereign states; heads of sovereign nations coming together. Experts in the U.N. facilitate these meetings, but precisely that service endangers the meeting and allows it to be hijacked by people with an agenda.

We must always recognize that risk.

The funding for the U.N. comes from the sovereign heads of state. But the funding may also come with

demands or strings attached.

We need to recognize all that. So when the Millennium Development Goals come up for discussion it is likely that some people who are funding and driving the discussion have their own agenda and interests.

The voice of the Holy See has the value of serving as a reminder of certain issues that are often shoved under the rug.

Even if the position of the Holy See is not adopted, it serves as a reminder to the nations about these issues and values, the importance of protecting life and human dignity.

Even if we are the lone voice in the hall, it is necessary.

Many people still congratulate us for discussing certain issues.

The Holy See's activities can also lead to other discussions about why certain states are discussing issues, or it may lead to loss of funding for others.

For example, before Pope Benedict visited London, someone asked about overseas development, if reproductive health was going to be hard-wired into all aid. It means that all aid that goes out will have this as a condition of funding. This was something that was able to be discussed because of the Church's presence in the UN.

All of these details we need to recognize when we talk about participating in the UN.

We must make the truth of the Church known regardless of the hearing it gets.

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Part 1: www.zenit.org/article-30819?l=english

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