Vatican COVID-19 Commission

Week 4 philosophical reflection



Gambian children by John Savage



Pope Francis has asked the Vatican COVID-19 Commission to consider the key issues arising from the pandemic and reflect on the new socio-economic-cultural approaches needed to build a better future. This is Week 4's philosophical reflection.

An open letter to the protagonists of the future

1. The terrible experience of the COVID-19 pandemic makes us retrace the path of our humanity, in which concern and suffering, despair and hope are mixed. In these days, many of our brothers and sisters are mourning with their families and many have given their lives to heal those who have fallen ill.

These are foremost in our thoughts as we write this 'open letter to the protagonists of the future' because their commitment has shown us what the future of life is based on. It is to them that we want to address these words of gratitude, without which there is no possibility of a human future.

> On the road to Emmaus, near Jerusalem, two men 'were talking together about all that had happened… Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but their eyes were prevented from recognising him'
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> – Luke 24:14-16

2. Events and the urgency of situations, such as decisions to be made, can prevent us from recognising he who walks close to us and who calls us to a new life, to move from death to life. When we remember what we have shared with those who went before us, when we reread our human history, we understand that we cannot go on 'as before'.

2. The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of the vulnerability of life and the human condition. We had often forgotten it, believing ourselves to be powerful masters, capable of dominating the entire universe. The pandemic has also showed us the limits of our health care systems.

4. We have rediscovered that we need each other and that our individualism imprisons us in the illusion of solitary autonomy. We have learned that human solidarity is not an idea but is expressed even in the smallest gesture of attention, protection and care.

> 'Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.' – Luke 24:27

5. We understand that we cannot start again 'as before'. To care for and promote responsible development means to choose an economy that follows other rhythms, other projects and perspectives, that takes into account the fragility of life, the very poorest, the planet that is our 'common home' and the climate, which is our 'common good' and our air. Consideration for the future of life, from the 'infinitely small' to the 'infinitely great', must prevail over individual interest and immediate gain, which close our eyes to the consequences of our human activity.

6. We have our share of responsibility in the imbalances that cause the suffering and premature death of our brothers and sisters: the systematic destruction of biodiversity, the pollution of seas, lands and air, the depletion of natural and human resources, all these dimensions of our uncurbed production contribute to the loss of physical and relational equilibrium.

7. We cannot restart 'as before': we must make fundamental choices, which appeal to our knowledge, our technology, our production capacities, but also to our moral values and our spiritual convictions. The health of living organisms, their complementary nature and the future of Creation are absolute priorities. This will result in new human activities, especially in the fields of agriculture, energy, construction and transport. We need a new vision, in line with what we call 'integral ecology', which connects the earth, living beings and the human community in a peaceful and harmonious relationship. This is the teaching of the One who has entrusted life to us, of whom he is the Source and to whom he gives his breath. This is also learnt by re-reading our own history: development is not an appropriation or an unlimited accumulation, but the search for what makes us more human and brings us closer to others.

8. We cannot start again as before: knowledge and possessing must be at the service of the human community and the planet and not the other way around. Our knowledge and experience, including suffering, must allow us to invest in caring for life, in education and in the protection of relationships between all living beings and in the enhancement of the cultural richness and the spiritual life of our humanity.

9. The three dimensions of emergency, which we are committed to facing, now unite life, the human community and the future of the planet. For this reason the emergency does not only mean restarting the economy, or national and international financial mechanisms, but it means effecting the transition to a new ecological, climatic and social balance, in accordance with the objectives of sustainable development and peace-building, a *conditio sine qua non*.

> 'While he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him…'
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> – Luke 24:30-31

10. It is the gesture of sharing bread that opens our eyes to the future. The broken bread brings together and symbolises all that we have, all that we know, all that we have learned and even all that we have suffered. We have to share everything and no single individual can define or limit what exists for the community.



Here is the new Law, which can allow us to leave behind the type of economic production and development that exhausts and kills. The sign of 'shared bread' embodies mutual trust and gratitude among living beings, but it is also a sign of rediscovered joy. Returning to Jerusalem to find the Apostles and their companions, the two disciples of Emmaus participate in the founding of the community, within which each offers his own experience and gives witness to his faith.

The 'protagonists of the future' are called, with the diversity of their lives, to solicit the **talents and riches** 'of the whole man and of all men'.

The 'protagonists of the future' will invest with confidence and financial means in what **makes humanity grow** and not in what destroys it.

The 'protagonists of the future' will espouse the principle that knowledge and skills can truly serve an **integral human development** if they safeguard the Word (dialogue), the Promise (law and rights) and the Forgiveness (the permanent care for reconciliation, between communities and between countries) that inspires us with God's infinite love.

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