

THE CRISIS AND THE NEW HUMANISTIC SYNTHESIS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Abstract

Our research plan will focus on three key elements. One concept, the crisis; one research thread, the social doctrine of the Catholic Church on the crisis; one case study, the Portuguese Catholic Church and the practical application of theology in the face of crisis. First, we will try to comprehend our dependent variable by inserting it in a specific context (contemporary post-industrial societies) and in a specific period of time (since the late XIX century until today). Secondly, we will make it interact with some independent variables such as the financial, economic, political, cultural and anthropological framework of modern societies. Thirdly, throughout a diachronic and synchronic analysis of the Church's multiple and unexplored primary sources we will be able to observe the evolution of the phenomenon, understand its modern consequences, and to interpret the Church's proposition to overcome the crisis. Finally, in order to give greater substance to our research, we will focus on Portugal to see how, in a context of profound socio-economic crisis, the Church has been acting with the view to promote and practice a new humanistic synthesis that places man as the aim and center of all socio-economic life.

Keywords: crisis, Catholic Church, new humanistic synthesis, charity, Portugal.

1. WHAT KIND OF CRISIS¹?

The meaning of the expression *crisis* comes from the ancient Greek word *krisis* that meant a turning point in a disease when an important change takes place, indicating either recovery or death.

¹ Supported by the Erasmus Mundus Action 2 Programme of the European Union.

According to Castells², the main problem of today's metaphorical disease is its denial. It was firstly financial and then it changed suddenly. In line with the argument of the metamorphosis of the crisis, the financial crisis triggered an industrial crisis that initiated an unemployment crisis that led to a demand crisis that ultimately led to a fiscal debacle. With the evolution of the disease, nowadays there are multiple arguments over its origins and, despite the pluralism of the current viewpoints, eventually there will be a common ground where they all agree³, *inter alia*, that capitalism is threatened by its own excesses; that our societies are prisoners of market speculation and of short-sighted vision; that capital circulation has created the illusion of an everlasting wealth not based on work; that the ease of getting credit became a dangerous trap; that the decrease of savings turned consumerism into a dangerous virus; and that the decline of the ethical sense of economy, i.e., the use of the available resources and their allocation to meet the needs. So what kind of crisis is this, financial, economic or cultural? Is there both a structural and multidimensional crisis? Should we change the system from top to bottom? Should we reform what we call capitalism and liberalism? Or should we rethink our ethical behaviors? For Pierre de Charentenay⁴ the answer relies on the diagnosis of the illness. On the one hand, if there was technical incompetence, those responsible must be punished and measures should be taken to ensure that such a disaster does not happen again. On the other hand, if the diagnosis finds moral justifications for the crisis, solutions must be found for decisions taken by economic and financial agents as well as personal decisions directed towards our communities.

The answer from the Catholic Church's point of view is clear. The crisis symbolizes modern society's fragile moral framework – our principles of right and wrong guiding our behavior. According to Pope Benedict XVI⁵ this time of intense difficulty or danger sets the perfect ground for a *new humanistic synthesis* which places man as the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life. But what represents, in fact, this doctrine? Is it really a new pro-

² Manuel Castells, João Caraça and Gustavo Cardoso. "The Cultures of the Economic Crisis: An Introduction". In *Aftermath: The Cultures of the Economic Crisis*, ed. Manuel Castells *et al.*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 1-15.

³ Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins. "Uma Crise com Lições, Muito Urgentes". *Communio* 1 (2012), p 37.

⁴ Pierre de Charentenay. "La Sortie de Quelle Crise?". *Études* 1 (2009), pp. 5-8.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI. Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, 21, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_benxvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html.

position for mankind, or a market economy, or both? What are its instruments and methodology? How does it express on the ground with the victims of the crisis? What role should charity and charitable institutions play in this context? What are the advantages over other doctrines or politics of social intervention?

These are some of the questions that we will seek to address in our research.

Because of the fact that this is such an intricate, complex and multidimensional subject it will be necessary to resort to a case study that allows us to understand what does, *de factum*, this new antidote to the crisis represent. Portugal represents an excellent case study for two reasons. Firstly, since it experienced some of the most profound consequences of the crisis. Secondly, because since 1974 the CEP – Portuguese Episcopal Conference – has been advocating this doctrine through numerous pastoral letters, notes and interdisciplinary pastoral reflection that have enabled the Portuguese Roman Catholic Church (hereinafter “the Church”) to act accordingly to the new social reality.

2. THE PORTUGUESE PASTORAL REFLECTION OVER THE CRISIS (1974-2001)

The idea of pastoral reflection sends us back to the concepts of Church and Gospel, but also to notions like organization of the believer’s community and articulation of the Christian message with communities’ evolution⁶.

In Portugal, the modern concept of pastoral reflection started in January 1959 when the CEP launched the Religious Information Secretariat and, consequently, the first Bulletin of Pastoral Information⁷. The Church’s pastoral reflections faced immediate threat after the Carnation Revolution of 1974 outside of the apprehension of integration and accommodation in the new democratic regime⁸. These were the prevalence of particular interests of the political and

⁶ Nuno Estevão Ferreira. *Dicionário de História Religiosa de Portugal*. Vol. III, Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2000-2001, p. 385.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

⁸ Manuel Braga da Cruz. “A Igreja na Transição Democrática Portuguesa”. *Lusitania Sacra* 8-9 (1996-1997), pp. 529-536.

economic agents over the common good and the danger of a socio-economic crisis and its consequences to the poor⁹.

Nine years later, that concern increased. Material well-being and consumeristic excesses of the Portuguese society in 1980 were creating an economic emergency that, in consequence, was degenerating into a crisis of habits. To the CEP this was what society as a whole should fear most, being that such practices blocked men's fulfillment¹⁰. In accordance to the pastoral note of 1983¹¹, this materialistic and consumerist ethos of Portuguese society led to the death of the spirit, the sclerosis of fraternal love, the incapacity of an altruistic sacrifice and to the inability to adopt those principles that should guide people's lives¹². In other words, Portugal was starting to experience a moral and spiritual crisis¹³.

Coimbra's bishop D. João Alves better articulated this idea in a 1989 homily:

"[I] will emphasize the importance of fighting this selfish individualism wave that grows among us. Step by step the idea that each of us should only take care of our own personal interests is rising (...) not minding the interests of our communities¹⁴".

But who was responsible for this selfish individualism?

–The idolatry of economic goods and its mistaken doctrine that advocates that economic value is the most important in life, says D. João Alves¹⁵.

To the bishop, the crisis originated in the illusion that economic solutions could solve all of mankind's problems. But, according to him,

⁹ CEP. "Sobre o Contributo dos Cristãos para a Vida Social e Política". *Lumen* 7-8 (1974), pp. 35-36. *To face this challenges of liberal, capitalist and consumerism societies, the Church appeals to the conscience of the Portuguese to help with justice and charity those who need the most and suggests that its social institutions should dedicate themselves, more and more, to the social and charitable apostolate. Ibid., 36. CEP. "Perspectivas Cristãs da Reconstrução da Vida Nacional". *Lumen* 5 (1979), p. 201.*

¹⁰ CEP. "Nota do Conselho Permanente sobre a Actual Situação da Vida Portuguesa". In *Documentos Pastorais*, III vol., Lisbon: Rei dos Livros, 1983-1990, pp. 329-330.

¹¹ We must interpret this letter in light of French bishops' declaration "Pour des nouveaux modes de vie" of September 1982 in which, in the face of the economic crisis and of its consequences, the French Catholic Church appealed to the solidarity and generosity of people, in order to fight selfishness and to promote new ways of living.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 331-332.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ D. António Monteiro. "Peregrinação a Fátima a 13 de Outubro. Homília de D. João Alves, Bispo de Coimbra". *Lumen* 10 (1989), p. 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

*this is false. In order to solve them we should promote the full development of all people as a whole and not enslave them to the mere conquest of economic and financial wealth*¹⁶.

Regardless of Church's recommendations since 1974¹⁷, at the dawn of the XXI century, dazed with the symptoms of cultural mutation still occurring in contemporary Portuguese society, the CEP publicized the pastoral note "Crisis of society, crisis of civilization" in 2001.

Among the most troubling phenomena, the CEP identified the increasing corruption and social marginalization, the fragmentation and weakening of political power, the emptying of ethical standards of behavior, the pragmatic immediatism and the selfish individualism. According to the Church, all of them had a common ground – they all clouded the horizon of the common good¹⁸.

The Portuguese bishops, despite taking responsibilities in this process, assumed again¹⁹ the will to contribute to the resolution of this modern crisis – within the context of their specific mission and on their own sphere of action.

The bishops' solution to this civilization crisis relied on a new culture of solidarity, in which the rights of individuals relent over the demands of the common good. Based on the Christian duty of fraternal love, this new culture should allow the reinvention of three key aspects of society: i) the primacy of ethics, ii) a new sensibility that diminishes technology's coldness and iii) generational harmony²⁰.

In short, according to forty years of pastoral reflection, if we deny liberalism without rules and without a sense of fairness, if we refute the ideology of numbers over people and if we put forward a sense of integral development of human life over the materialistic spirit, a new culture of solidarity shall emerge²¹. According to this argument, the denial of today's spiritual mediocrity will help us to

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ CEP. *Documentos Pastorais*. VI vols., Lisbon: Rei dos Livros, 1967-2005.

¹⁸ EP. "Crise de Sociedade, Crise de Civilização", 2001, 8, accessed May 14, 2015, <http://www.agencia.ecclesia.pt/noticias/documentos/crise-de-sociedade-crise-de-civilizacao/>.

¹⁹ As we have seen on footnote 9, this is an action that the Church already had taken since the democratic transition in 1974, but that has secular roots in Portugal. Jorge Botelho Moniz. "A Igreja Católica e a Caridade em Portugal". *Revista Brasileira de História das Religiões* 19 (2014), pp. 224-233.

²⁰ António Bagão Félix. "Repensar Portugal à Luz da Doutrina Social da Igreja". *Agência Ecclesia* 835 (2001), p. 7.

²¹ *Ibid.* "Sociedade para o Século XXI". *Agência Ecclesia* 805 (2001), p. 4.

overcome the particular interests of individuals and start a new societal model where the common good becomes visible as the inspirational archetype of our collective coexistence.

3. THE PASTORAL SHIFT: CIVILIZATION OR ECONOMIC CRISIS?

After denouncing, in a first phase, the civilization crisis that contemporary societies, especially the Portuguese, were living at the dawn of the XXI century, the CEP turned its attention to the relationship between that first level of crisis and the second one – the economic realm.

To the CEP, the crisis that Portugal was facing was not only economic but also, and above all, moral and spiritual. Among other things, it translated the relativization of values and principles, the resignation to fight for a fairer and peaceful society and the modern will to take refuge in purely individual and private benefits²². According to the Church, expressions like selfishness and perverse economic mechanisms are a commonplace in these societies, reflecting a certain echo of an ethic-moral nature that is hostile to human progress. Putting this differently, those were *modern structures of sin*²³ that have a big impact on market ethics. Conforming to the argument, it is impossible to conceive a market without boundaries since that leads to poorly distributed richness and to capital accumulation of a small group of individuals. The reality of society is in clear opposition to the principles of social justice, human rights and common good that the social doctrine of the Church promotes.

This is particularly relevant after the experience of recent years, considering that social order has been gradually conditioned by the economic sphere. In consonance with the argument, when economic freedom becomes autonomous and people are seen more as producers or consumers of goods than as subjects who produce and consume in order to live, then economic freedom loses its necessary relationship to the human person and ends up alienating and oppressing them²⁴.

In spite of this position, the Church's doctrine does not try to canonize or condemn the market. It only seeks an articulation between society, economy and politics that allows a convenient mar-

²² CEP. "Responsabilidade Solidária para o Bem-Comum". In *Documentos Pastorais*, ed. CEP, vol. VI, Lisbon: Rei dos Livros, 2002-2005, p. 91.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

²⁴ CEP. "O Trabalho na Sociedade em Transformação", 2002, 5, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.diocese-braga.pt/cdjp/texto_detalhes.php?recordID=55.

ket regulation and the instruction of the moral conscience of economic agents towards the common good²⁵.

The Church's argument is that a market economy has the potential to encourage wealth as well as to promote prosperity within societies, allowing us to fight against poverty and misery. In order to achieve it, modern societies must consider every man as the protagonist, the center and the end of all socio-economic life. In other words, the socio-economic realm should be conceived in a way that consents that all men and women participate in the benefits and difficulties of the economic activity, according to principles of justice and equity²⁶.

Notwithstanding the Church's advice and concerns, the economic and financial crisis was about to formally erupt. In the face of that, the hierarchy publicized the pastoral note "A look of hope and responsibility over the country's financial crisis" in 2005.

In this document, the CEP no longer places itself in a position where it could prevent the consequences of the spiritual crisis; on the contrary, it now appears as an unavoidable player to diminish the consequences of the economic debacle.

"The measures presented by the government, in order to solve the deficit problem of the State, will originate a period of austerity and exigency (...) they threat those who have already been more sacrificed (...).

"The bishops do not have to pronounce themselves on technical questions of economic and financial policy. But then again as we are talking about a serious problem that affects all the national community (...) and of unavoidable ethical dimensions, it seems important to us to remember some aspects of the social doctrine of the Church²⁷".

The Church shows a clear conscience of the costs of austerity policies as well as of the profits that can arrive in terms of structural changes. That having been said, there is a deeper preoccupation with specific social groups that in the near future would probably need solidarity of fast intervention. That is why, in this pastoral note, we find an appeal to the social works of the Church to double their

²⁵ José Patrício. "Crise, Sinal dos Tempos". *Communio*, 3 (2009), p. 298.

²⁶ CEP. "O Trabalho...", 5.

²⁷ CEP. "Um Olhar de Responsabilidade e de Esperança sobre a Crise Financeira do País". In *Documentos Pastorais*, ed. CEP, vol. VI, Lisbon: Rei dos Livros, 2002-2005, p. 243.

efforts of solidarity and to practice the “fantasy of charity²⁸” towards the poorest. In line with the document, there will not be long or medium term solutions to the crisis if some crucial values like generosity, creativity or responsibility for the common good are not taught and promoted in the ensemble of all community. That is where the Church must play a vital role²⁹.

4. CRISIS, A PREDICTION FULFILLED

The conclusions of the CEP letters and notes since 1974 were, in fact, a response to centuries of the Vatican’s pastoral reflection.

In effect, it has been since the late nineteenth century that the Holy See through the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of 1891 has cited the danger of corruption, the insatiable greed and the unrestrained competition of industrial societies. The infamous working class question was, in consonance with the document³⁰, passing beyond the sphere of politics and making its influence felt in the cognate sphere of practical economics. The difference in the financial dignity of a few individuals in face of the utter poverty of the masses, as well as the prevailing moral degeneracy of industrial societies caused this shift³¹. To the Vatican, this phenomenon was generated by public institutions and laws that were setting aside ancient religion, allowing immoral individuals to misuse people as if they were things in the pursuit of gain or to value them solely for their physical powers.

In order to correct this, a modern economy should be paying more attention to the duties of religion and morality because, otherwise, it would degenerate and end by becoming little better than those societies which take no account of religion. For Pope Leo XIII, modern States will only be able to prosper and thrive if they respect principles such as the moral rule, religion and justice, well-regulated family life and the moderation and fair imposing of public taxes³².

Despite the Church’s advice, forty years after the publication of Pope Pius XI’s Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, the Holy See denoun-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

³⁰ Pope Leo XIII. Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, 1891, 16, accessed May 14, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum_novarum.html.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

³² *Ibid.*, 32.

ced the expansion of a capitalist economic regime and of its negative consequences over the economic and social lives of everyone.

In agreement with the argument, this regime of “despotic economic dictatorship³³”, in which we see not only wealth concentration but an immense power consolidated in the hands of a few groups of individuals, presented three kinds of conflict: a fight for economic supremacy itself; then, by using its resources and authority, a struggle to gain economic primacy over the State; and finally, there is conflict between States themselves. In short:

“Free competition has destroyed itself; economic dictatorship has supplanted the free market; unbridled ambition for power has likewise succeeded greed for gain; all economic life has become tragically hard, inexorable, and cruel³⁴”.

The following decades of pastoral reflection confirmed all the Vatican’s worst fears and projections. For instance, in the 1940’s and in milieu of World War II, Pope Pius XII compared the economy of the last decades – during which the lives of all citizens were subordinate to the stimulus of gain – to a modern “fateful policy³⁵” of exclusion of all thought of ethics or religion that was costing millions of lives.

Twenty years later, in the context of the II Vatican Council (1962-65), in particular with the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* – on the Church in the modern world –, Pope Paul VI, referring to the economic and social realms, saw lots of reasons for “anxiety³⁶”. For him the fundamental finality of economy – the service of man – was not being attained to the detriment of financial profit and economic control of a few groups of people. Consequently, the economy and society were calling for practical reforms and, above all, for a change of mentality and attitude of all.

With the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967), on the development of peoples, Pope Paul VI emphasizes his remarks over an unbridled liberalism that has neither limits nor concomitant social obligations. Instead of tolerating a particular type of tyranny, eco-

³³ Pope Pius XI. *Encyclical Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931, 105, accessed May 14, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo_anno.html.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁵ Pope Pius XII. “The Internal Order of States and People. Christmas Message of 1942”, accessed May 14, 2015, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P12CH42.HTM>.

³⁶ Pope Paul VI. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, 63, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

conomic development, said the Pope, is supposed to be at the service of man. On the contrary, programs designed to increase productivity should be reducing inequities, eliminating discrimination, freeing men from the bonds of servitude and thus giving them the capacity to further their moral growth and to develop their spiritual endowments³⁷.

In fact, as Pope John Paul II concluded in 1987, for the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, the experience of recent years has shown that unless all the considerable body of resources and potential at man's disposal is guided by a moral understanding and by an orientation towards the true good of the human race, it easily turns against human kind to oppress it³⁸.

As we had the opportunity to observe, this has been the Vatican's position, claim and advice for almost a century of pastoral reflection.

5. REENTERING INTO THE XXI CENTURY. CHARITY AS THE ANTIDOTE TO THE CRISIS?

The Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* not only motivated a fruitful pastoral dialogue over the modern problems of economy, but it also gave through the doctrine of charity – “the safest antidote³⁹” – the tools to face the selfishness of the century.

One of the most important documents emerging in this context was the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (SDC) in 2004. In accordance with the SDC, the free market is an instrument of great social importance because of its capacity to guarantee effective results in the production of goods and services⁴⁰. When it rightly carries out those important functions it becomes an element to the common good and to integral human development⁴¹. However, the economic system does not possess criteria for correctly dis-

³⁷ Pope Paul VI. Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, 1967, 34, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_pvi_enc_26031967_populorum_en.html.

³⁸ Pope John Paul II. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987, 28, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jpii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html.

³⁹ Pope Leo XIII. *Rerum Novarum*, 35.

⁴⁰ Pope John Paul II. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004, 347, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 348.

tinguishing new and higher forms of satisfying human needs from artificial new needs⁴². The modern phenomena of consumerism⁴³ and materialism⁴⁴ show us how fine that line can be. To the Church, because of the concrete risk of a certain idolatry of the market and of its immediate consequences – the reductionist vision of the human person and society – and of its proven inability to satisfy human needs, the free market must therefore comprise certain limits as well as be firmly rooted in ethical purposes that promote justice and the common good⁴⁵.

Charity, as “the great social commandment⁴⁶” of the Church, would play a vital role in the achievement of such a desideratum.

“History shows how hearts are devastated when men and women are incapable of recognizing other values or other effective realities apart from material goods, the obsessive quest for which suffocates and blocks their ability to give of themselves.

“In order to make society more human (...), love in social life — political, economic and cultural — must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity. This love may be called «social charity» (...)”⁴⁷.

Charity is the theological virtue⁴⁸ by which we love God above all things and by which we love our neighbor (family, friends, strangers or enemies) like ourselves by the love of God (*1Co*, 13: 2-7; *John*, 13: 35; *John*, 15: 12; *Matt.*, 22: 36-39). The affiliation of charity to a divine entity puts it at a superior level when compared with non-eminent feelings like mercy, generosity or human benevolence. This *agape*, i.e. the gift⁴⁹ of loving God and consequently our fellow citizen, contains a quality of gratuity that does not expect from others any kind of material or immaterial return⁵⁰. The intertwined con-

⁴² *Ibid.*, 376.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 583.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 581-82.

⁴⁸ According to the Apostle Paul, among the three theological virtues (faith, hope and charity), charity is the most important as it represents the bond of perfection (*Cl*, 3: 14).

⁴⁹ However this *agape* was not born originally in human beings. It is not a mere commandment. On the contrary it is an answer to the gift of love that God offered us (*1John*, 4: 10).

⁵⁰ Alfredo Teixeira. “Os mundos sociais da acção sócio-caritativa”. *Communio* 26, 2 (2009), pp. 210-211.

cept of *caritas-agape*⁵¹ has thus an interconnected triple feature: it permits the triumph over the *amor sui*, it promotes a genuine sentiment of love for others and it does not consent to any kind of seduction for mundanity. Following the examples of the Samaritan and of Martin of Tours (*Luke*, 10: 33-37; *Matt.*, 25: 45), people should, therefore, drive their actions exclusively towards ideals of abnegation and gratuity⁵².

As Pope Benedict XVI states in the Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* of 2005, as well as proclaiming the word of God and celebrating the sacraments, *caritas-agape* is part of the Church's deepest nature. It is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally be left to others; conversely, it is an indispensable part of its very being⁵³. For the Pontiff charity is always a necessary good, even in the fairest society. Our times particularly, where despite the great advances made in science and technology we have a culture of selfishness and egoism and we observe all kinds of suffering and poverty, call for a new readiness to assist our neighbors in need⁵⁴. *Caritas*, as an "anti-culture of death"⁵⁵ that shows man's willingness to lose himself for others, is the Church's organized⁵⁶ armed wing for the promotion of the common good and, consequently, to face the civilizational crisis we are going through.

Furthermore, the different aspects of the crisis, its solutions and any new development that the future may bring are, according to the Pope, increasingly interconnected. They imply one another and require new efforts of holistic understanding and a *new humanistic synthesis*.

"The complexity and gravity of the present economic situation rightly cause us concern (...) we are called by the prospect of a world in need of profound cultural renewal (...).

"It requires new eyes and a new heart, capable of *rising above a materialistic vision of human events*, capable of glimpsing in development the «beyond» that technology cannot give. By following this

⁵¹ Pope Benedict XVI. Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 2005 § 25b accessed May 14, 2015. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html. Pope Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate*, 1.

⁵² G. M. Salvati. "Ágape". In AAVV (eds.), *Lexicon - Dicionário Teológico Enciclopédico*, 2ª ed., São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2003, pp. 7-8.

⁵³ Pope Benedict XVI. *Deus Caritas Est*, 25a.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 30a.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 30b.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

path, it is possible to pursue the integral human development that takes its direction from the driving force of charity in truth⁵⁷”.

For the Pontiff⁵⁸, the significant new elements in the picture of the development of societies today demand new solutions in many cases. These must respect the laws proper to each element and reflect the different aspects of the human person. Such an integral vision of man, considered through a lens purified by charity in truth⁵⁹, will make possible some convergences and solutions, without any fundamental component of human life being obscured. The great challenge ahead of modern civilization thus is to demonstrate, in thinking and behavior, not only that traditional principles of social ethics like transparency, honesty, responsibility, fraternity or gratuity cannot be ignored or attenuated, but that they can also find their place within normal socioeconomic life.

In the face of this intricate and multidimensional framework, Pope Benedict XVI, in a homily in 2009⁶⁰, condenses this problem in the following dichotomous query:

- Are we ready to interpret the crisis as a challenge for the future and not only as an emergency to which we must find short-term solutions?
- Or are we prepared to undertake a profound revision of the prevalent model of development, in order to correct it with concerted far-sighted interventions?

For the Pope, if we center ourselves on the first question we will only be able to address the immediate financial crisis (shallow solution), but if we concentrate on the latter we will be able to correct the moral and cultural crisis (deep solution).

⁵⁷ Pope Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate*, 21 and 77.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁹ The connection between charity and truth is justified by the Pontiff because of the misconstruction and emptying of meaning that the concept of charity has had and continues to suffer. On the one hand, without truth, charity is confined to a narrow field devoid of relations and it is excluded from the plans and processes of promoting human development of universal range. On the other hand, with truth, charity can be recognized as an authentic expression of humanity and as an element of fundamental importance in human relations. This *caritas in veritate* thus becomes essential for building a good society and for true integral human development (*Ibid.*, 2-4).

⁶⁰ Pope Benedict XVI. “Homily: Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God and 42nd World Day of Peace”, 2009, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2009/documents/hf_benxvi_hom_20090101_orld-day-peace_en.html.

The reduction of societies to technological, financial and economic spheres, even if it promotes short-term (economic) profits, in the long term hinders the achievement of a lasting (human) development. For that reason the crisis compels men to an effort of further and deeper reflection on the meaning of the economy and its goals, as well as a profound and far-sighted revision of the current models of society and common good, so as to correct its dysfunctions and deviations. In consonance with the Encyclical⁶¹, this is required, above all, by the cultural and moral crisis of man, whose symptoms have been evident for some time all over the world.

More recently, Pope Francis returns to these socioeconomic dilemmas and, after the most challenging moment, he is able to present a clearer vision of what should be the integral development of the human person. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of 2013, the new humanistic synthesis starts with the rejection of the new idolatry of money, since accepting its domination over individuals and societies means the denial of the primacy of the human person⁶². For the Pope, this economic, ethical, spiritual and human crisis⁶³ is not only a natural consequence of putting “god-money⁶⁴” at the center of the world, but above all a grave symptom of the lack of respect for man⁶⁵ and, subsequently, a betrayal of the common good⁶⁶.

Such a crisis, in which everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest⁶⁷, has “tragic consequences for the life of society⁶⁸”. There is priority to the outward, the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial and the provisional⁶⁹; individualism favors a lifestyle which weakens the development and stabi-

⁶¹ Pope Benedict XVI. *Caritas in Veritate*, 32.

⁶² Pope Francis. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, 55, accessed May 14, 2015, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

⁶³ Pope Francis. “Meeting with workers – Pastoral Visit to Cagliari”, 2013, accessed May 14, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130922_lavoratori-cagliari.html.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Pope Francis. “Address to Participants in a Conference - The 50th Anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*”, 2013, 3, accessed May 14, 2015, http://m.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/en/speeches/2013/October/documents/papa-francesco_20131003_50-pacem-in-terris.html.

⁶⁶ Pope Francis. “Meeting...”.

⁶⁷ Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

lity of personal relationships⁷⁰; selfish lifestyles frequently make us indifferent to the world around us and especially to the poor⁷¹; men and women risk being reduced to mere cogs in a machine that treats them as items of consumption to be exploited⁷²; technical and economic questions dominate political debates, to the detriment of genuine concern for human beings⁷³; and whenever a human life no longer proves useful for the economic machine it is thrown away (v.g. the elderly)⁷⁴.

To face the idiosyncrasies of the current “throwaway culture⁷⁵”, two things are necessary according to the Holy See. First of all, we must say *no* to an economy of exclusion and inequality⁷⁶, as well as to the proliferation of this “culture of waste⁷⁷”. Second of all, in order to attain the new humanistic synthesis, we must remove the law of profit and gain from the heart of our lives and put the human person and the common good back at the centre⁷⁸. As the Pope exclaims: “men and women must be at the centre as God desires, and not money!⁷⁹”.

The doctrinal reflection developed throughout the last centuries justifies the readiness of the Catholic Church as a whole, but in particular the Portuguese Church, to deal with the undeniable ethical dimensions of the crisis at the dawn of the 21st century. In Portugal, the formal outbreak of the crisis started in 2011⁸⁰. However, as we already examined, thirty seven years before its eruption the Church already pointed out the dangers of our contemporary economies⁸¹, by revealing them but also by preparing to help to solve those threats. Notwithstanding, with the first bells of the crisis ringing, that reflection and preparation got deeper.

Some signs were evident. The 1st Congress of the Social Pastoral of September 2008, the Symposium “Reinvent Solidarity (in times of crisis)” of May 2009, the reflections of the XXVI week of the social

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷¹ Pope Francis. “Address to European Parliament”, 2014, accessed May 14, 2015, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/11/25/pope_francis_address_to_european_parliament/1112318.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53.

⁷⁷ Pope Francis. “Meeting...”.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Moniz. “A Igreja...”, p. 238.

⁸¹ Remember CEP’s pastoral notes of 2001, 2003 and 2005.

pastoral of September 2010, *inter alia*. In addition, other important documents, reflections and actions emerged from this context, in particular in 2011 – the year of the crisis⁸².

Following the line of other Catholic countries with similar religious background and going through the same civilization and economic crisis – we must recall the French bishops' document "Au coeur de la crise: faire credit, faire confiance" of 2008 or the declaration of the Spanish Episcopal Conference "Declaración ante la crisis moral y económica" of 2009 –, the Portuguese Church publicized an ultimate document⁸³ over its mission in a country in crisis.

The CEP's note "Mission of the Church in a country in crisis" of 2012 is the anthology of the Portuguese ecclesial hierarchy thesis and strategy over the subject.

On the first three elements of the document, we can find the Church's target group – the poor and the unemployed –, its instruments and practical doctrine to face the crisis – the social intervention carried out by the Church's institutions of social solidarity, as an active practice of charity – and the principles of the SDC that should inform the Portuguese contemporary society – priority to the common good, right to work, political stability, respect for truth and generosity of honesty⁸⁴.

The latter aspects of the note directly address the demands of cultural, financial and economic renewal. Firstly, it denounces those who were responsible for the crisis – systems and individuals, companies and groups that were not directing their gains to the common good –; secondly, it suggests a new path in order to correct this disequilibrium and to create conditions for the development of individuals – a new balance between finances and economy where the market is subordinated to an ethical dimension that serves human beings⁸⁵.

⁸² Chronologically, the documents of the laical group National Commission Peace and Justice "Co-responsible on the urgent challenge of change" of April 2011 and "Overcoming the crisis and put up Portugal: on justice and solidarity" of October 2011; the CEP's communication "Over the present moment" of the country of June 2011 or the pastoral note "Crisis, desecry and compromise" of December 2011.

⁸³ We find in 2013 two new documents of the CEP that talk about this subject. One is the pastoral note "Family strength in times of crisis" of April 2013 and the other is the message "Ethical challenges of human work" of November 2013. If the first one centers its attention on the role of family within the current context of crisis, the latter focuses on Pope Francis's discourse to Cagliari workers in September 2013. Therefore they are not pertinent to this discussion.

⁸⁴ CEP. "Missão da Igreja num País em Crise", 2012, 1-3, accessed May 14, 2015, <http://www.agencia.ecclesia.pt/noticias/documentos/missao-da-igreja-num-pais-em-crise/>.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

Overcoming the multidimensionality of the crisis, therefore, presupposes above all a cultural renewal inspired by Christian values, says the pastoral note⁸⁶. For the Church, the time is right to put forward some principles of its social doctrine, considering that in times of emergency like this, where the *status quo* is shaken, the seeds of new stages of coexistence and of collective sense of life are more likely to be found and to thrive.

6. CRISIS, CHARITY AND THE CHURCH'S INDISPENSABILITY IN THE XXI CENTURY?

The longstanding civilization, economic and financial crisis that the Portuguese society has been going through has dragged the country to a situation of national emergency⁸⁷.

In this turbulent context, the main answer of the Church has been given by its social institutions, as a model to solve the problems of families and as an active practice of charity. According to some authors, the Church has "more than anyone⁸⁸" abundant and diversified resources to practice charity, among which we enumerate:

- Almost 2,000 IPSS – Private Institutions of Social Solidarity for the purpose of social action. Virtually 40% of the country's IPSS in 2010⁸⁹.
- In 2013 more than 4,300 parishes disseminated throughout the country in which, through Christian volunteering, we can observe the practice of the social pastoral. Approximately 27% of parishes have a PSC – Parish Social Center⁹⁰.
- Nearly 100,000 employees in the ensemble of the Church's institutions in 2012.
- Social assistance of more than 500,000 situations of emergency in 2007.
- Around 25,700 actions of domiciliary care services in 2007.
- 20 Diocesan Caritas spread throughout continental Portugal and the autonomous regions of Azores and Madeira.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁷ Moniz. "A Igreja...", pp. 238-39.

⁸⁸ José Fortunato. *Textos Cristãos: 25 de Abril, Novembro 25*. In ed. José Fortunato, 1.^a ed., col. Forças da Vida, 2. Lisbon: Ulmeiro, 1977, p. 17.

⁸⁹ Francisco Senra Coelho. "Igreja e a Pobreza em Portugal". *Lumen* 5 (2011), pp. 85-86.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

- Over 158,000 requests for individual aid in 2012 and virtually 16,500 families supported in 2013.
- Approximately half of the State’s budget on the field of social action (42%) in 2012⁹¹. In 2011, for instance, it corresponded to a value of €1.300 million transferred to CNIS - National Confederation of Social Institutions⁹².
- Innumerable tax benefits, such as the refund of the VAT⁹³, on the purchase of movables, provision of cultic services and exercise of statutory purposes – more than €85 million between 2005-2009 (more than 98% of the total amount distributed to religious organizations) – to the Church and to its social institutions (average of 1,200 per year)⁹⁴.

According to the argument, in the face of this “trail of love⁹⁵” or, in a less liturgical way, due to this network of essential social goods that gives firm and efficient answer to the emergencies of the community, it is inevitable that the country asks for help from those who have been born to help specially in times of crisis⁹⁶.

“And today, as we see the bankruptcy and ruin of the Welfare State (...) the ones we see on the ground in Portugal are the social institutions (...) giving help and support to millions of people with basic needs, to which the State is incapable to give answer⁹⁷” (Artur Rêgo, CDS-PP – People’s Party).

“The (...) Socialist Party looks to the IPSS, to the houses of mercy and to mutualities as institutions that have every right to become the major players in the dynamics of this social market⁹⁸” (Maria José Gamboa, PS – Socialist Party).

⁹¹ Moniz. “A Igreja...”, 241.

⁹² Agência Ecclesia. “Governo Reforça Parceria com as Instituições Sociais”. *Agência Ecclesia* 1315 (2011), p. 4.

⁹³ José de Sousa e Brito. “Le financement des communautés religieuses au Portugal”. In B. Gaudemet and S. Berlingò (eds.), *The Financing of Religious Communities in the European Union*, European Consortium for Church and State Research, Trier: Institute for European Constitutional Law, 2009, pp. 291-292.

⁹⁴ Maria Lopes. “Estado devolveu 85,7 milhões de euros em IVA à Igreja Católica entre 2005 e 2009”. *Público*, 18 March 2011. Accessed May 14, 2015, <http://www.publico.pt/sociedade/noticia/estado-devolveu-857-milhoes-de-euros-em-iva-a-igreja-catolica-entre-2005-e-2009-1485539#?frm=det>.

⁹⁵ CEP. “Instrução Pastoral sobre a Acção Pastoral da Igreja”, 1997, 22, accessed May 14, 2015, http://novo.cnis.pt/images_ok/Caridade%20e%20Solidariedade_%20Papal%20dos%20Cristaos%20Numa%20Sociedade%20Mais%20Solidaria.pdf.

⁹⁶ Moniz. “A Igreja...”, p. 242.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

“Social institutions exist to help others and it is time for the Government to humbly ask them for help. It makes no sense to the State to build its own infrastructures when there are already social responses; what makes sense is to use most of the structures that are on the ground and to simplify their activity⁹⁹” (Minister of Solidarity and of Social Security, Pedro Mota Soares).

If, on the one hand, the Portuguese State affirms that the role of those social institutions is indispensable to help easing the effects of the crisis¹⁰⁰; on the other hand, political praxis has been proving it; on the other hand, political *praxis* has been proving it.

Following the argument that underlines the State’s inability to give answer to all situations of social need¹⁰¹, we can give the 2013 example of Oporto’s town hall. In this case, the mayor Rui Rio asked Oporto’s bishop D. Manuel Clemente for help to implement and coordinate a program of social emergency, evaluated at €2 million. The justification of such a request was based on the fact that only through the Church’s action would it be possible “to reach easily to those who truly need help¹⁰²”.

Another example is the human rights award, granted by the National Assembly, that since its creation in Portugal in 1999 it has already rewarded, directly or indirectly, to the Church four times (three times after the outbreak of the crisis). In 2012, it did it again through the Portuguese Caritas. According to the commission of the prize, this award was given to Caritas because of its intervention in the present situation of social emergency towards those who are incapable to assure their basic needs¹⁰³. As the CEP¹⁰⁴ and the

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ In Portugal, even in the social realm, this perception is significant. According to a study of the Portuguese Catholic University, roughly 50% of Portuguese consider that without the Church there would be more poverty. Furthermore, if we compare the numbers of the levels of perception of the Church’s response to social problems, Portugal is one of the highest ranked: Italy 39,2% ; Portugal 35,7% ; Poland 35,2% ; Slovakia, 33,3%; Austria, 31,3%; Greece 26,7% ; Spain 26,3% ; Germany 25,6% ; United Kingdom 25,3% ; and France 22,0%. *Ibid.*, pp. 244-245.

¹⁰¹ The State only has on its hands 25% of the social intervention network, and therefore, it is only capable of intervening on 17% of the total of social protections in the country. *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Rádio Renascença. “Câmara e Igreja do Porto lançam plano de emergência social”. *Rádio Renascença*, April 23, 2013, accessed May 14, 2015, http://rr.sapo.pt/bolabranca_detalhe.aspx?fid=29&did=104988.

¹⁰³ Parlamento. “Prémio Direitos Humanos 2012”. *Parlamento*, December 10, 2012, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.parlamento.pt/Paginas/XIIL2S_AtribuicaoPremioDireitosHumanos2012.aspx.

¹⁰⁴ CEP. “Voto de Congratulação”. December 11, 2012, accessed May 14, 2015, <http://www.agencia.ecclesia.pt/noticias/documentos/voto-de-congratulacao->

Portuguese Caritas pointed out¹⁰⁵, this prize was a way for the national Parliament to say that the Church's principle of charity, understood as we saw as a force that drives human action towards ideals of abnegation and gratuity, can be one of the solutions to overcome the multiple expressions of the crisis.

More recently, we have the ceremony held in 2015 by the president of the Portuguese Republic, distinguishing personalities and institutions of social solidarity. While awarding the priest Lino Maia of CNIS, the deacon Albino Martins of the Algarve dioceses and the Diocesan Work of Social Promotion, among others, the president declared that Portugal should be "thankful to God¹⁰⁶" for this network of social institutions that has been decisive to face poverty and social exclusion in the country, including of children.

In this context of social and economic crisis, the Church's social and charitable missions – through its strong regional and social implementation and large panoply of goods on its disposal; by its permanent contact with the situations of the world susceptible of change, particularly in times of crisis; through the evolution and update of its methods of intervention; and by the use of charity as a criterion of credibility capable of reaching a certain social repercussion – are commonly accepted as a healing operation to the whole community and, in the twenty first century, rather than socially useful, it seems that it has become socially indispensable¹⁰⁷.

7. FINAL REMARKS

Our work was enlightened, *grosso modo*, by three key questions: what kind crisis is this? How does it express in contemporary societies? What tools are there to fight it?

For the Church, as we saw, it is unquestionable that we are facing a brutal economic and financial crisis, but it is also incontestable that the seed of it relies on a secular and deeply rooted civilization crisis. It is true that both types of crisis are profoundly

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¹⁰⁵ Caritas. "Prémio dos Direitos Humanos. Intervenção na Sessão Solene". December 10, 2012, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.caritas.pt/site/nacional/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc.

¹⁰⁶ Octávio Carmo. "Portugal/Crise: Presidente da República elogia ação das instituições sociais junto dos «mais frágeis»". *Agência Ecclesia*, 29 April 2015, accessed May 14, 2015, <http://www.agencia.ecclesia.pt/noticias/nacional/portugalcrise-presidente-da-republica-elogiou-trabalho-das-instituicoes-sociais-em-favor-dos-mais-frageis/>.

¹⁰⁷ Moniz. "A Igreja...", pp. 246-47.

intertwined; however, we can only surpass the first if people are available to overcome the latter. In other words, we can only succeed over the economic crisis if we are ready to accept a new culture that allows us to encourage a new humanistic synthesis that says *no* to the denial of the primacy of the human person over money and that places the man as the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life.

To put forward this new mindset and culture that allow individuals to develop a new humanism, society needs a *fresh great social commandment*. Charity, as the *agapic feeling* we show to our neighbor by the love of God, by its intrinsic character of abnegation and gratuity, is to be understood as the Church's ultimate contribution. The analysis of the Portuguese case study helped to prove it. To the Church, only charity is capable of glimpsing in development the *beyond* that rationality, technology or mere compassion cannot give.

Charity then becomes a fundamental principle for a progressively unified world that makes individuals more dependent on each other. Thus only when all parts of the social body find themselves, intimately, as members of one family – sons of the same celestial father and united in one body, of His child – it will be possible to pursue that integral human development that takes its direction from the driving force of *caritas-agape*.

Notwithstanding, many questions over this thesis are yet to be answered. We decided to put them in two levels: a macro, where we try a holistic questioning of the phenomena, and a micro, where we are concerned with its internal plausibility.

On the first one, we have to wonder how such a crisis will alter the Church's relationship with contemporary society and, consequently, how much it is expected for modern culture to change. In an ultramodern and hyper-secularized Europe, despite the persistence of heterogeneous religious bonds, is it still possible for Christian moral values to flourish? How plausible is it to change society from bottom to top without imposing a Christian Sharia that enforces, legally and politically, the Church's moral code? When the Portuguese State, as any other, encourages the Church's charitable activities, is it really engaged in helping to create a new model of society, or is it doing it wholly because of matters of financial rationalization, or both? When the Church invests in these kinds of social activities, is it really concerned with the need of cultural renewal, or is it merely trying to protect its social credibility, or both?

On the second one, we question if this *caritas-agape* that allows a new humanistic synthesis is tangible to every human being in any

society. If so, how is this process of conversion developed, through education, politics, evangelization or another method? Will it be necessary to recreate society as a whole or will this doctrine comprehend a milder way to reform contemporary vices? Should not this be an effort of all the structures of the whole society, or because of its moral implications, ought it to be an exclusive mission of the Church? What kind of long term social efficacy can we expect from its spiritual and temporal instruments to fight the crisis? What about its unintended consequences? If the new humanistic synthesis is not based on any technical or financial criteria, how can we ensure that it does not lead, *de factum*, to a regression in terms of development, progress and innovation on the economic and social realms?

Whatever the answer to those queries and whatever the plausibility of a new humanistic synthesis, we must consider the contribution of the Church as an opportunity to rethink our contemporary globalized, capitalist, materialistic and individualistic society. Despite the variations that may take place on the theoretical debate over the different paths to be taken, the Church's principles – such as solidarity instead of competition, promotion of human life as an alternative to a culture of death and edification of a perennial future over social disposability – sum up some of the main ethical and moral concerns we should be addressing in order to prevent a similar or worse crisis in the future.

The new humanistic synthesis should therefore be understood as a representation of how the relations that individuals establish with each other should be (but are not). Not in a sense of a political or, in this case, a religious agenda, point-by-point, but giving us the ability to evaluate basic notions such as social improvement and regression.

As Kant would say, any plan that aims at the perfect union between human persons must be regarded as possible¹⁰⁸. It is our conviction that even the most idealized conditions presented in the new humanistic synthesis, more importantly than its degree of reasonability or plausibility, can be regarded as an ideal which is worth aspiring to.

¹⁰⁸ Immanuel Kant. "Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan purpose". In Reiss, Hans (ed.), *Kant's Political Writings*, 2^a ed., Cambridge: University Press, 1979, p. 51.