Chapter Five

LINES OF APPROACH AND ACTION [163-201]

- Dialogue on the environment in the international community [164-175]
- Dialogue for new national and local policies [176-181]
- Dialogue and transparency in decision-making [182-188]
- Politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfilment [189-198]

Summary

This chapter addresses the question of what we can and must do. Analyses are not enough: we need proposals “for dialogue and action which would involve each of us individually no less than international policy” (15). They will “help us to escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us” (163).

For Pope Francis it is imperative that the developing real approaches is not done in an ideological, superficial or reductionist way. For this, dialogue is essential, a term present in the title of every section of this chapter. “There are certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a broad consensus. [...] the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. But I want to encourage an honest and open debate, so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good” (188).

On this basis, Pope Francis is not afraid to judge international dynamics severely: “Recent World Summits on the environment have failed to live up to expectations because, due to lack of political will, they were unable to reach truly meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment” (166). And he asks “What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?” (57).

Instead, what is needed, as the Popes have repeated several times, starting with Pacem in terris, are forms and instruments for global governance (175): “an agreement on systems of governance for the whole range of the so-called “global commons” (174), seeing that “environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits. The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces” (190, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church).

In this fifth chapter, Pope Francis insists on development of honest and transparent decision-making processes, in order to “discern” which policies and business initiatives can bring about “genuine integral development” (185). In particular, a proper environmental impact study of new “business ventures and projects demands transparent political processes involving a free exchange of views. On the other hand, the forms of corruption which conceal the actual environmental impact of a given project in exchange for favours usually produce specious agreements which fail to inform adequately and do not allow for full debate” (182).

The most significant appeal is addressed to those who hold political office, so that they avoid “a mentality of ‘efficiency’ and ‘immediacy’” (181) that is so prevalent today: “but if they are courageous, they will attest to their God-given dignity and leave behind a testimony of selfless responsibility” (181).