

Labour, Lodging, Land. The Pope has created his battle...

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The [Pope spoke at the World Meeting of Popular Movements](#), taking place in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, yesterday. He did not mince his words. I will quote liberally.

He began:

Let us begin by acknowledging that change is needed. Here I would clarify, lest there be any misunderstanding, that I am speaking about problems common to all Latin Americans and, more generally, to humanity as a whole. They are global problems which today no one state can resolve on its own.

I think that was important: he did not mean to be misunderstood: this was not just a South American message. The message he was delivering to the world was:

So let's not be afraid to say it: we need change; we want change.

What on (and I stress I have edited here for brevity)?

In your letters and in our meetings, you have mentioned the many forms of exclusion and injustice which you experience in the workplace, in neighborhoods and throughout the land.

These are not isolated issues. I wonder whether we can see that these destructive realities are part of a system which has become global. Do we realize that that system has imposed the mentality of profit at any price, with no concern for social exclusion or the destruction of nature?

If such is the case, I would insist, let us not be afraid to say it: we want change, real change, structural change.

We want change in our lives, in our neighborhoods, in our everyday reality. We want a change which can affect the entire world, since global interdependence calls for global answers to local problems. The globalization of hope, a hope which springs up from peoples and takes root among the poor, must replace the globalization of exclusion and

indifference!

He continued:

[I]n my different travels, I have sensed an expectation, a longing, a yearning for change, in people throughout the world. Even within that ever smaller minority which believes that the present system is beneficial, there is a widespread sense of dissatisfaction and even despondency. Many people are hoping for a change capable of releasing them from the bondage of individualism and the despondency it spawns.

Time, my brothers and sisters, seems to be running out; we are not yet tearing one another apart, but we are tearing apart our common home. Today, the scientific community realizes what the poor have long told us: harm, perhaps irreversible harm, is being done to the ecosystem. The earth, entire peoples and individual persons are being brutally punished. And behind all this pain, death and destruction there is the stench of what Basil of Caesarea called “the dung of the devil”. An unfettered pursuit of money rules. The service of the common good is left behind. Once capital becomes an idol and guides people’s decisions, once greed for money presides over the entire socioeconomic system, it ruins society, it condemns and enslaves men and women, it destroys human fraternity, it sets people against one another and, as we clearly see, it even puts at risk our common home.

I thought this interesting:

I do not need to go on describing the evil effects of this subtle dictatorship: you are well aware of them. Nor is it enough to point to the structural causes of today’s social and environmental crisis. We are suffering from an excess of diagnosis, which at times leads us to multiply words and to revel in pessimism and negativity. Looking at the daily news we think that there is nothing to be done, except to take care of ourselves and the little circle of our family and friends.

And he then asked the question:

What can I do, as collector of paper, old clothes or used metal, a recycler, about all these problems if I barely make enough money to put food on the table? What can I do as a craftsman, a street vendor, a trucker, a downtrodden worker, if I don’t even enjoy workers’ rights? What can I do, a farmwife, a native woman, a fisher who can hardly fight the domination of the big corporations? What can I do from my little home, my shanty, my hamlet, my settlement, when I daily meet with discrimination and marginalization? What can be done by those students, those young people, those activists, those missionaries who come to my neighborhood with their hearts full of hopes and dreams, but without any real solution for my problems? A lot! They can do a lot. You, the lowly, the exploited, the poor and underprivileged, can do, and are doing, a lot. I would even say that the future of humanity is in great measure in your own hands, through your ability to organize and carry out creative alternatives, through your daily

efforts to ensure the three “L’s” (labor, lodging, land) and through your proactive participation in the great processes of change on the national, regional and global levels. Don’t lose heart!

After saying much more he concluded saying (and I have edited, again):

I would like to propose three great tasks which demand a decisive and shared contribution from popular movements:

3.1 The first task is to put the economy at the service of peoples. Human beings and nature must not be at the service of money. Let us say NO to an economy of exclusion and inequality, where money rules, rather than service. That economy kills. That economy excludes. That economy destroys Mother Earth.

3.2. The second task is to unite our peoples on the path of peace and justice.

Despite the progress made, there are factors which still threaten this equitable human development and restrict the sovereignty of the countries of the “greater country” and other areas of our planet. The new colonialism takes on different faces. At times it appears as the anonymous influence of mammon: corporations, loan agencies, certain “free trade” treaties, and the imposition of measures of “austerity” which always tighten the belt of workers and the poor. The bishops of Latin America denounce this with utter clarity in the Aparecida Document, stating that “financial institutions and transnational companies are becoming stronger to the point that local economies are subordinated, especially weakening the local states, which seem ever more powerless to carry out development projects in the service of their populations”.

3.3. The third task, perhaps the most important facing us today, is to defend Mother Earth.

Our common home is being pillaged, laid waste and harmed with impunity. Cowardice in defending it is a grave sin. We see with growing disappointment how one international summit after another takes place without any significant result. There exists a clear, definite and pressing ethical imperative to implement what has not yet been done. We cannot allow certain interests — interests which are global but not universal — to take over, to dominate states and international organizations, and to continue destroying creation. People and their movements are called to cry out, to mobilize and to demand — peacefully, but firmly — that appropriate and urgently-needed measures be taken. I ask you, in the name of God, to defend Mother Earth.

The whole text is worth reading, and I stress I am not a Catholic and I do not accept all Catholic social teaching. What I do recognise is a man (and he is no more) who is using his unique position of authority to say what he believes needs to be heard, and speaks of what he believes the mission of his Church to be.

I applaud him for that.

Few have that courage.

As a man who never expected such power he is using it well.

And I approve of a great deal of what he says.