News
EarthBeat



At the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development at the Vatican Nov. 24, participants discuss Pope Francis' exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* on the 10th anniversary of its publication. (CNS/Cindy Wooden)

Cindy Wooden

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — November 27, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

An effective proclamation of the Gospel must speak with hope to the real-life problems of the poor, to the need to protect the Earth and to the ability of people of goodwill to change the social and financial systems that harm the poor and the environment, Pope Francis said.

"Ten years after the publication of *Evangelii Gaudium* ['The Joy of the Gospel'], let us reaffirm that only if we listen to the often-silenced cry of the earth and of the poor can we fulfill our evangelizing mission, live the life Jesus proposes to us and contribute to solving the grave problems of humanity," the pope wrote to a conference marking the anniversary of his first exhortation.

The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development organized the conference Nov. 24, the anniversary of publication of the exhortation, which was widely described as outlining Francis' vision for his pontificate.

In his message to the conference, the pope said the proclamation of the Gospel today — like it was for the church of the first centuries — "requires of us a prophetic counter-cultural resistance to pagan, hedonistic individualism," resistance "to a system that kills, excludes and destroys human dignity, resistance to a mentality that isolates, alienates and limits one's inner life to one's own interests, distances us from our neighbor and alienates us from God."

Being a "missionary disciple," he said, means working for the kingdom of God by struggling for justice, providing food to the hungry and working for a fair distribution of goods.

Putting the poor at the center of one's concern, the pope wrote, "is not politics, is not sociology, is not ideology — it is purely and simply the requirement of the Gospel."

Advertisement

The practical implications of that requirement could vary, depending on whether one is a government leader or a business owner, a judge or a labor union worker, he said, "but what no one can evade or excuse themselves from is the debt of love that every Christian — and I dare say, every human being — owes to the poor."

Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the dicastery, told participants that the "joy of the Gospel" comes "from the encounter with the risen Lord who, passing through the humiliation of the cross, takes upon himself the sin, weakness, miseries and poverty of the human race, so that all might share in his victory over death."

The joy of the Gospel, the cardinal said, gives Christians and the whole church the grace, motivation and strength "to go beyond referring to its own self and move toward the margins, in order to look right at that suffering humanity often considered as mere 'waste,' as inevitable and acceptable 'collateral damage,' as 'necessary sacrifice,' as an 'offering' owed to the idols of consumption."

Juan Grabois, founder of the Confederation of Popular Economy Workers in Buenos Aires, Argentina, told the conference about how he moved away from the church in adolescence and young adulthood believing the church to be "reactionary, hypocritical, accommodating and distant from the serious social problems of my country and the world."

Then, about 20 years ago, he heard the archbishop of Buenos Aires, the future Pope Francis, give a homily supporting the rights of the "*cartoneros*," the people who lived off collecting paper and other objects for recycling.

The pope, he said, has always advocated "for the poor, the excluded and the oppressed, be they individuals, groups or peoples."



Pope Francis holds a copy of his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* in 2014. (CNS/Paul Haring)

"This aspect of his personality remained when he was elected pope," Grabois said. "Francis has continued to advocate for the poor just as before, but with more strength, with a strength that did not slacken, and his voice is heard all over the world."

Living in a way that cares for the poor and for the Earth will mean sacrificing some material comforts, he said, "but Francis tells us that if we fulfill this Christian mandate, if we fulfill it well, we will be happy, that this is where we will find Jesus

again, that this is the wellspring of faith, that this is where the joy of the Gospel is to be found."

"He proposes that we exchange well-being for joy," he said.

Evangelii Gaudium is a document on evangelization, but it also advances Catholic social teaching, several participants noted. It shows the inextricable bond between the church's mission and care for the poor that goes beyond charity.

"There is nothing more anti-Christian, anti-Catholic, than the divorce between spirituality and social liberation," Grabois said. By his words and example, Jesus taught that Christians must love their neighbor and care for the poor.

Czerny said that if one were to print out everything the pope has said and written in the past 10 years and weighed them, "I suspect that the spiritual, theological, ecclesial content is heavier than the social," but the media tends to focus on his pronouncements on social issues without highlighting how they are connected.

Dominican Sr. Helen Alford, president of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, told the conference that St. John Paul II was the first pope to teach that Catholic social teaching was part of Catholic moral theology — highlighting how faith has implications for the way a believer must live and act in society and not only in one's personal life.

"With St. John Paul, you get this idea [of social teaching] really coming into the center of the church's evangelizing mission. And not everybody's understood that yet," she said. By calling his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, she said, Francis is continuing to give a central place to the connections between faith and life, especially as they impact the poor.