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Pope Francis condemns profit-centered economy

by Tony Magliano

Making a Difference

"Just as the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say 'thou shalt not' to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills," Pope Francis wrote in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel").

Here, the Holy Father teaches that living and sharing the joy of the Gospel necessarily demands that Christians have a deep and active concern for the plight of the poor who suffer so many injustices from an economy that puts profit above people.

The pope writes, "Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.

"Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded."

This is especially true in the corporate world, where often benefits are cut, wages remain stagnant, workforces are slashed -- putting more work on fewer people -- and unions are suppressed.

Not satisfied with these unjust cost-cutting measures, which produce profits for upper management executives and stockholders, corporate greed sinks even lower by often taking advantage of production facilities in poor nations where desperately impoverished people are ruthlessly exploited in corporate sponsored sweatshops.

"In this context," Pope Francis says, "some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater

justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power" and in the workings of the prevailing economic system. "Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting.

"To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed.

"Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own."

During the Christmas season -- and way before it really begins -- when companies entice us with their latest products, this statement from the pope has particular meaning: "The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us."

Highly critical of the enormous gap between the haves and the have-nots, the pope writes, "This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control."

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These powerful words from the Holy Father are surely meant to challenge us to undo the many injustices built into our economy and build an economic system that works for everyone, everywhere.

As a necessary step in that direction, urge your congressional delegation not to cut aid to the poor. This can easily be done by going to www.confrontglobalpoverty.org and clicking "take action now" then clicking "send the email" boxes.

In Pope Francis' words, "Money must serve, not rule!"

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings about Catholic social teaching. His keynote address, "Advancing the Kingdom of God in the 21st Century," has been well received by diocesan gatherings from Salt Lake City to Baltimore. Tony can be reached at tmag@zoominternet.net.]

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