**Summary of the JPIC Promoters meeting:**

The monthly JPIC promoters meeting was held on the 16th of January 2019 at the headquarter of UISG in Rome. This meeting was organised by the African Working Group and focused on the topic “Politics, Civil Society and Peace: The Effort of the Church”.

After the opening prayer prepared by Sr Emily Jocson (ICM), and the presentation of the 25 members of various Religious congregations and institutes, Sr Anne Falola (OLA) introduced the speaker Fr. Rocco d’Ambrosio. He is Director of studies and Professor of Political Philosophy at the Faculty of Social Science of the Pontifical Gregorian University and accepted to deepen the chosen topic by relating it to Pope Francis’ message for the Celebration of the 52nd World Day of Peace 2019: “Good politics is at the service of peace”.

It would be too long to get into all the details of the very inspiring and enriching conference and interaction with Fr. Rocco d’Ambrosio. The following summary will mention some issues and aspects of the conference. For more details, please consult the PPP (CLICK here).

Fr Rocco d’Ambrosio started by clarifying the concept of civil society which is a complex and pervasive concept in Western thought. Concerning the concept of politics, even many hours of lecturing would not be enough to explain all the notions, classifications and themes related to it. Many meanings are actually associated to the word politics such as: question of power, economic interests, global challenges, weak leaders, crisis of democracies, populism, and new fascism. One of the last UN report on democracy pointed out that of all the democratic regimes, only 4 per cent are full democracies.

In his 52nd World Day of Peace message (WDPM), Pope Francis applies the already existing social teaching of the Church to today’s challenges of politics. The message invites all actors at different levels to take politics seriously – local, regional, national and worldwide.

The message says: “Politics is an essential means of building human community and institutions, but when political life is not seen as a form of service to society as a whole, it can become a means of oppression, marginalization and even destruction.”( WDPM n°2) The consequences are “corruption in its varied forms” as well as “xenophobia, racism, lack of concern for the natural environment, the plundering of natural resources for the sake of quick profit and contempt for those forced into exile” (Ibid.n°4).

The speaker raised many questions such as: how to build peace in a context of crisis? How to relate the different actors: ‘politicians’, ‘civil society’, ‘Church’? Peace is one goal to achieve, but the meaning of peace and its expression can be quite different among various actors: peace as a goal within history or behind history? How does a Local church act and interact? Are church members aware of living in a world where they are not alone?

Beyond the theological and ecclesiological understanding of the church, underlined Fr. D’Ambrosio, it is necessary to remember that we don’t belong to the world, but we live in this world and we are actors in the same society, where we are not the only ones searching for peace.

It is important to stress that society is not a monolithic body. Citizens have mixed identities and loyalties. They belong to various communities, groups, clubs, movements, religious beliefs. They are confronted and influenced by different meanings in daily life.

In this social context, the speaker stressed that the role of the members of the Church is to give meanings to people. The mission of the church is helping people to grow culturally.

The speaker referred to the speech pronounced by Pope Francis on May 25th 2013 saying that the “The current crisis is not only economic and financial but it is rooted in an ethical and anthropological crisis. Concern with the idols of power, profit and money, rather than with the value of the human person has become a basic norm for functioning and a crucial criterion for organization.”

Fr Rocco underscored that the actual problems we are facing are rooted in an ethical and anthropological crisis. Therefore, the emergency is cultural, rather than political or economical. Culture is to be understood in its broader sense expressed in the ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World’, Gaudium et Spes n°53. According to this understanding, culture includes the task to develop human capacities and to render “social life more human both in the family and the civic community”.

The speaker drew the attention to the fact that there is a real need for discernment and for patience in today’s context of crisis.

The speaker invited the participants to read GS n°4 which states that the Church has “the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. … We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.” It is also important to review the application of the ”see-judge-act” method, because people judge easily and rapidly without deep analyses.

Patience in the dialogue and in offering words. Today’s political language is often based on many words but with shallow meaning. That easily leads to manipulation and facilitates “a climate of mistrust rooted in the fear of others or of strangers, or anxiety about one’s personal security” (Ibid. n°5). The spin doctor’s strategy in political communication is to manipulate truth.

People are getting more information and having more access to information, but this does not mean that they are getting more knowledge. The challenge is to build new meanings. The Church has this capacity to build meanings in dialogue with other actors in society. “Politics is at the service of peace if it finds expression in the recognition of the gifts and abilities of each individual. … Together with our heart and our intelligence, our hands too can become a means of dialogue” (Ibid. n°5).

The Church can facilitate and empower people to grow culturally by listening and by promoting participation, trust and respect so that “everyone can contribute his or her stone to help build the common home.” (Ibid. n°5). Meanings are built by engaging “every woman, man and generation” who “brings the promise of new relational, intellectual, cultural and spiritual energies.” (Ibid. n°5) Growing culturally means also to give sense to words and to put it into concrete political action. For example, speaking about ‘common good’ needs to be translated into the politics, and that is the welfare state. It is also important to “reaffirm that peace is based on respect for each person, whatever his or her background, on respect for the law and the common good, on respect for the environment entrusted to our care and for the richness of the moral tradition inherited from past generations.” (Ibid.n°6)

“Today more than ever, our societies need “artisans of peace” who can be messengers and authentic witnesses of God the Father, who wills the good and the happiness of the human family.” (Ibid. n°5)

**After the break**, the participants interacted in small groups to deepen and follow up the issues raised from the conference. Several questions were addressed to the speaker.

On the question how to act in the political situation by promoting values, the speaker reminded that charity is also related to working together for the good of the human family, for justice, peace, caring for the common home, for welcoming and integrating migrants. The promotion of charitable attitudes within all communities, among all members, is also important. It is important that people engaged in charitable deeds need to consider politics in order to make workable projects.

To the question of the causes of today’s political crisis, the speaker put the emphasis on globalisation and the fact that politicians have not been able to govern it.

Another question was related to the Church that requires honesty to politicians but unable to practice it within its ‘own house’.

*If the reader likes to get more information about reforms within Church, it is possible to consult the book “Will Pope Frances Pull it off? The challenges of Church Reforms”, by Rocco d’Ambrosio, 2017 (in English, Spanish and Portuguese, Italian)*

At the end of the interaction between the speaker and the audience, the moderator, in the name of all participants, expressed deep gratitude to Fr. Rocco for his inspiring and engaging words.

Before concluding the meeting, Fr Francois de Paul Houngue (SMA) explained the work of the African Working group and invited the participants to consult flyer containing all important information. (FLYER TO CLICK here).

Andreas Göpfert (MAFR) and Mariano Tibaldo (MCCJ)