



CHAPTER THREE

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THE WEAKNESS OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

34. Although “our own days seem to be showing signs of a certain regression ... each new generation must take up the struggles and attainments of past generations, while setting its sights even higher. This is the path. Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day.”²⁴ For there to be solid and lasting advances, I would insist that, “preference should be given to multilateral agreements between States.”²⁵

35. It is not helpful to confuse multilateralism with a world authority concentrated in one person or in an elite with excessive power: “When we talk about the possibility of some form of world authority regulated by law, we need not necessarily think of a personal authority.”²⁶ We are speaking above all of “more effective world organizations, equipped with the power to provide for the global common good, the elimination of hunger and poverty and the sure defense of fundamental human rights.”²⁷ The issue is that they must be endowed with real authority, in such a way as to “provide for” the attainment of certain essential goals. In this way, there could come about a multilateralism that is not dependent

on changing political conditions or the interests of a certain few, and possesses a stable efficacy.

36. It continues to be regrettable that global crises are being squandered when they could be the occasions to bring about beneficial changes.²⁸ This is what happened in the 2007–2008 financial crisis and again in the Covid-19 crisis. For “the actual strategies developed worldwide in the wake of [those crises] fostered greater individualism, less integration and increased freedom for the truly powerful, who always find a way to escape unscathed.”²⁹

I. RECONFIGURING MULTILATERALISM

37. More than saving the old multilateralism, it appears that the current challenge is to reconfigure and recreate it, taking into account the new world situation. I invite you to recognize that “many groups and organizations within civil society help to compensate for the shortcomings of the international community, its lack of coordination in complex situations, and its lack of attention to fundamental human rights.”³⁰ For example, the Ottawa Process against the use, production and manufacture of antipersonnel mines is one example that shows how civil society with its organizations is capable of creating effective dynamics that the United Nations cannot. In this way, the principle of subsidiarity is applied also to the global-local relationship.

38. In the medium-term, globalization favors spontaneous cultural interchanges, greater mutual knowledge and processes of integration of peoples, which end up provoking

a multilateralism “from below” and not simply one determined by the elites of power. The demands that rise up from below throughout the world, where activists from very different countries help and support one another, can end up pressuring the sources of power. It is to be hoped that this will happen with respect to the climate crisis. For this reason, I reiterate that “unless citizens control political power — national, regional and municipal — it will not be possible to control damage to the environment.”³¹

39. Postmodern culture has generated a *new sensitivity* towards the more vulnerable and less powerful. This is connected with my insistence in the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* on the primacy of the human person and the defense of his or her dignity beyond every circumstance. It is another way of encouraging multilateralism for the sake of resolving the real problems of humanity, securing before all else respect for the dignity of persons, in such a way that ethics will prevail over local or contingent interests.

40. It is not a matter of replacing politics, but of recognizing that the emerging forces are becoming increasingly relevant and are in fact capable of obtaining important results in the resolution of concrete problems, as some of them demonstrated during the pandemic. The very fact that answers to problems can come from any country, however little, ends up presenting multilateralism as an inevitable process.

41. The old diplomacy, also in crisis, continues to show its importance and necessity. Still, it has not succeeded in generating a model of multilateral diplomacy capable

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of responding to the new configuration of the world; yet should it be able to reconfigure itself, it must be part of the solution, because the experience of centuries cannot be cast aside either.

42. Our world has become so multipolar and at the same time so complex that a different framework for effective cooperation is required. It is not enough to think only of balances of power but also of the need to provide a response to new problems and to react with global mechanisms to the environmental, public health, cultural and social challenges, especially in order to consolidate respect for the most elementary human rights, social rights and the protection of our common home. It is a matter of establishing global and effective rules that can permit “providing for” this global safeguarding.

43. All this presupposes the development of a new procedure for decision-making and legitimizing those decisions, since the one put in place several decades ago is not sufficient nor does it appear effective. In this framework, there would necessarily be required spaces for conversation, consultation, arbitration, conflict resolution and supervision, and, in the end, a sort of increased “democratization” in the global context, so that the various situations can be expressed and included. It is no longer helpful for us to support institutions in order to preserve the rights of the more powerful without caring for those of all.