



EDITORIALE / EDITORIAL

Democrazia?

Francesco Compagnoni

p. 2

STUDI / CONTRIBUTIONS

The Economic Thought of Thomas Aquinas:
From Theological Issues and a Philosophical
Framework to an Economic Understanding

Pierre Januard

p. 4

La tutela dei diritti umani di seconda genera-
zione nelle aree rurali dell'Argentina. L'impatto
della politica agricola nazionale sui processi di
sviluppo territoriale

Luigi Pisoni

p. 8

Transforming Smallholder Farming in the
Amhara Region of Ethiopia: A Path to Achiev-
ing the Sustainable Development Goals by 2023

Mulumebet Assefa Kassa

p. 11

SPAZIO APERTO / OPEN SPACE

An Outdated Sapiential Theology for
Understanding the Present: the China Case
Pierre Galassi

p. 24

The General Chapters OP and the Development
of Preaching Justice

Ivan Attard

p. 33

RECENSIONI / REVIEWS

M.M. Rossi - T. Rossi, «Come in un processo».
L'«Expositio super Iob ad litteram» di San
Tommaso d'Aquino, EDI 2024

p. 37

COLLABORATORI / CONTRIBUTORS

p. 39

EDITORIALE

EDITORIAL

Di Democrazia mi sono occupato quindici anni fa in occasione del Congresso ATISM (Associazione Teologica Italiana per lo Studio della Morale) a Pietralba (Bolzano).

“L’incerto potere La fragilità del sistema democratico” era il tema preciso. In tale studio mi occupai più di elencare i diritti umani che un governo democratico dovrebbe rispettare ed incrementare che dell’istituto giuridico “Democrazia”. Era il tempo, infatti, dove lavoravo intensamente sui diritti umani.

Tenni conto, senza approfondire, dei problemi definitori dei termini di partenza, ma di fatto presi come modello il discorso che Tucidide pone sulle labbra di Alcibiade, nel lontano sec. V a.C. Splendido esempio di retorica politica ma col difetto di essere bella, ed *inservibile*, come un bel monumento dopo la festa dell’anniversario dell’eroe. Almeno questa è la mia impressione attuale.

Riprendendo ora il discorso - e con una molta maggior documentazione derivante dall’abbondante e seria produzione nel campo delle scienze politiche riguardanti il destino della democrazia¹ - il primo passo di una riflessione in proposito diventa proprio la definizione, almeno descrittiva, dell’istituzione “democrazia”.

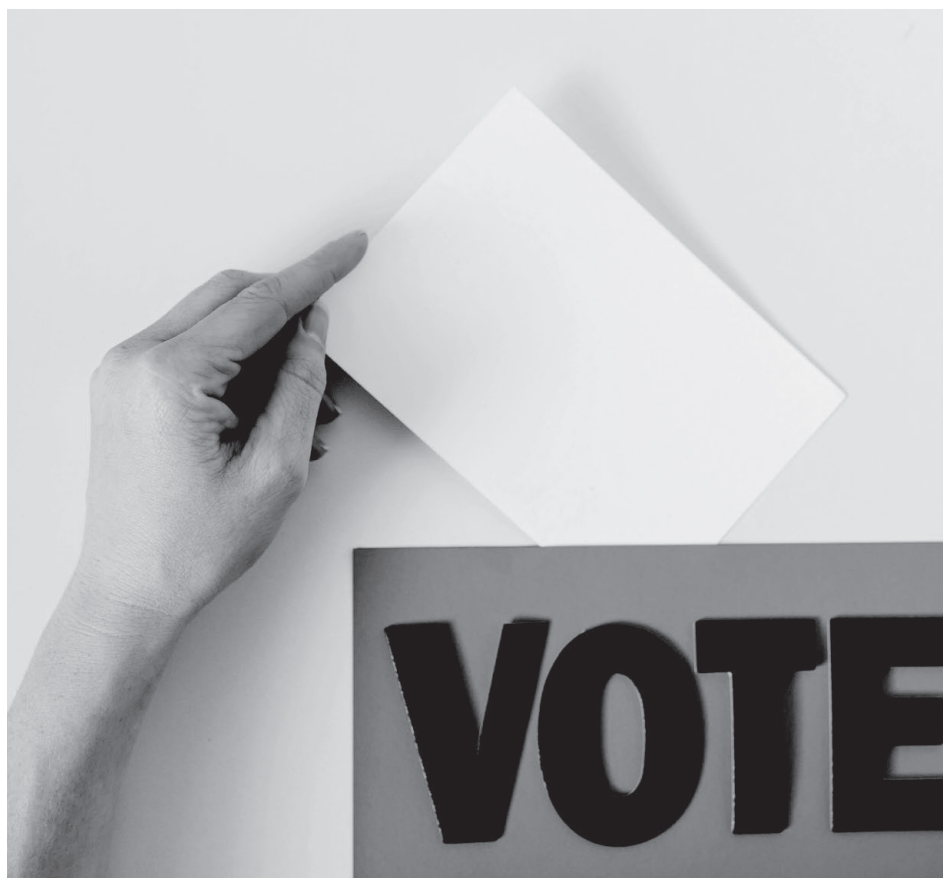
Tralasciando le definizioni classiche, e ben note, di Schumpeter o di Bobbio, potremmo dire che il problema si pone in una forma nuova rispetto a quello della classicità ateniese. Tenendo presente che oggi, seguendo i rilevamenti statistici come quelli di *V-Dem*², gli stati stanno scivolando sempre più verso forme lontane dalle democrazie liberali di stampo occidentali alle quale siamo abituati dal secondo dopoguerra.

Potremmo dire che una democrazia reale deve avere due caratteristiche fondamentali che rendono appunto democratico un governo. Primo: essere il risultato di una consultazione popolare molto larga, e, secondo, avere meccanismi che richiedono agli eletti di rispondere delle loro azioni agli elettori stessi, l’*accountability* degli anglosassoni.

Attorno a questi due pilastri si possono costruire le teorie, le prassi, i rilevamenti con tema “Democrazia”. Tra l’altro

Democrazia ?

Francesco Compagnoni



l’ampio processo che la Chiesa Cattolica ha intrapreso, la sinodalità, riveste le stesse caratteristiche.

Riflettendo sul dato di fatto dunque che le democrazie (complete od imperfette) si riducono sempre più di numero nel mondo, arriviamo a dire che oggi rappresentano appena 1/3 dei governi esistenti.

Ma la democrazia non è il fine intermedio di ogni agire politico per giungere ad una società umanisticamente civile? Com’è che tanta gente oggi ne rifugge? Quali i motivi di tale inversione di fatto e di mentalità?

Difficili da definire data la complessità del fenomeno e la sua ampiezza poliforme. Io propendo per il fatto che governare è diventato sempre più tecnicamente difficile. Si pensi alla politica monetaria, per indicare uno dei campi più minati. Da qui la tendenza di lasciare ampie aree alle competenze specifiche - di analisi e proposta di soluzioni - e di delegare a politici di professione di individuare i relativi problemi, rimedi, soluzioni.

Aggiungerei anche che la globalizzazione essenzialmente competitiva ci spinge

sempre più a voler vedere dei risultati misurabili, e non tanto la realizzazione di modelli astratti di giustizia sociale. Siamo attratti specialmente da tutto ciò che si lascia esprimere in termini di PIL, di efficienza e di *easy governance*. Vi ha contribuito anche la caduta delle ideologie, che rappresentavano comunque dei modelli morali e non solo materiali. Oggi invece la competitività ci porta a misurare tutto l’*humanum* solo in termini di produzione di beni e servizi. Ciò che non si lascia misurare è privato, non condivisibile a priori, perché strettamente personale e risultato di scelte non oggettivabili.

Anche i processi di secolarizzazione sono un segno di abbassamento degli ideali sociali collettivi e di una deriva verso un relativismo ideale, riducibile sempre più a criteri di valutazione legati al reddito misurabile e al welfare delle classi superiori, delle élites, al lusso, agli status symbol. Lasciando fuori dall’orizzonte sociale tutto ciò che sappia di ideale, di utopico e quindi poco misurabile. Il tutto poi trasmesso all’infinito ed impacchettato in forme luccicanti dalle

comunicazioni sociali, troppo spesso intrecciate con il commerciale.

Passando dal formale al sostanziale, si può ora fare un passo avanti e dire che, la elezione ampia e la accountability, caratteristiche minime ma sostanziali della democrazia, devono a loro volta fare riferimento ad un insieme di principi che potremmo chiamare “*Costituzione ideale*” che si nutre, giuridicamente, di diritti umani e, moralmente, di legge naturale.

I diritti umani, sia interni allo stato che internazionali che ideali (cioè modelli di comportamento non legali degli individui e delle aggregazioni sociali non statuali), sono abbastanza facilmente individuabili. Tramite i testi pubblici relativi di trattati, accordi, costituzioni statali.

La legge naturale invece è una visione morale legata ad una antropologia e ad una ontologia specifica della filosofia classica prekantiana. E qui interessa in modo particolare perché la struttura dei diritti umani rappresenta in un certo

modo i tondini che danno robustezza al cemento e ne fanno del cemento armato.

Al posto di *questa* teoria fondante dei valori umani, ci può di fatto esserne un'altra, ma con la stessa funzione di rinforzo della “*Costituzione ideale*” e non della sua storicizzazione estrema e del suo indebolimento.

Resta fermo comunque che la gestione dei diritti umani e della legge naturale, in democrazia, è legata alla tolleranza ed al rispetto reciproco. Infatti senza queste caratteristiche non esiste società umana accettabile anche dalle minoranze; e la pace sociale non è neppure immaginabile.

Senza sottovalutare però il pericolo di slittare verso il relativismo, il quale però, non soddisfa alla lunga nessuna delle parti sociali e genera conflitti di scalata al potere continui.

Nel campo delle scienze politiche e della riflessione etica sociale, è difficile, al di là di pochi principi fondamentali quali la *Costituzione ideale* e la *Legge naturale*, anche solo azzardare previsioni

sul reale sviluppo storico³.

Ma ciò che è irrinunciabile è l'impegno teoretico e politico per la realizzazione della giustizia sociale. Senza di questo la vita pubblica diventerebbe solo il campo d'azione dei più forti e dei più spregiudicati e le scienze sociali, teoretiche ed empiriche, perderebbero ogni attrattiva e rilevanza.

Senza di questo la vita pubblica diventerebbe solo il campo d'azione dei più forti e dei più spregiudicati e le scienze sociali, teoretiche ed empiriche, perderebbero ogni attrattiva e rilevanza.

NOTE

1. Carlo Galli, *Democrazia, ultimo atto?*, Einaudi, 2023; Marco Almagisti e Paolo Graziano (cur.), *La democrazia. Concetti, attori, istituzioni*, Carocci 2024.
2. <https://www.v-dem.net/>
3. Francis Fukuyama, *La fine della storia e l'ultimo uomo*, Utet, 1992.



STUDI
CONTRIBUTIONS

Thomas Aquinas's writing on economics represents only a very small part of his works, but remains the most important economic contribution in the Middle Ages in terms of both size and posterity. His economic texts can be grouped into two main stages, the early works and the mature works. Like any young theologian, Aquinas wrote a *Commentary on the Sentences* (1254–1256) of Peter Lombard. This commentary includes an article on the activity of merchants and an article on interest-bearing loans. Aquinas then wrote *De emptione et venditione ad tempus* (1262), a short letter on forward buying and selling, at the request of a friar who sought advice on what to do about Italian merchants who came to sell fabrics at the fair in Lagny, in France near Paris—i.e. he wanted to know whether forward sale is a form of usury. Then there is an economic passage on local supplies and the arrival of merchants in *De Regno* (1267?), Aquinas's political treatise. Finally, in the last years of Aquinas's life we find several economic texts, in particular his commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* (1269–1272) and the questions 77 and 78 of the *secunda secundae* and the *Summa theologiae* (1272), question 77 being on commercial fraud and question 78 on usury. To this we must add three texts which are spiritual and theological but in which Aquinas introduces the notion of “just price” before using the expression in dealing with economic questions. It is interesting to note that of the nineteen uses of the phrase “just price”, the first three do not concern economic texts. The expression appears first in the commentary on the book of Isaiah (1252), then in the *Commentary on the Sentences* on the sacraments, and it is not until *De emptione* that the expression appears in relation to economic questions and is used only in this area.

In Aquinas's works, economic issues are mainly dealt with under the virtue of justice. His aim is moral since it is a question of determining whether a man is in a state of sin. His references are

Aristotle, and also the Bible and the Church Fathers. In addressing moral issues relating to the virtue of justice from the perspective of philosophy and theology, Aquinas is led to make a step beside. In order to know if the economic agent is in a situation of sin, he needs to understand in a positive way the economic transactions of buying, selling, lending and borrowing. However, this understanding is underpinned by Aquinas's philosophical and theological roots, which enabled him to deepen his knowledge of the economics of his time. In order to highlight this mutual cross-fertilisation between philosophy, theology and economics, I will focus on two aspects of Thomasian economic thought: the epistemological dimension of his treatment of economic issues, and on the notion of the ‘just price’, which is often seen as the emblematic notion of Thomasian economic thought.

1. An Epistemological Framework

1.1 The Initial Gesture: Introducing the Risk of Misunderstanding

In the first economics-related text, the text of the *Commentary on the Sentences* on usury (*In III Sent.*, d. 37, a. 6, resp.), Aquinas departs from the social arguments of the Fathers, according to which the interest-bearing loan is forbidden because it is an exploitation of the poor. Aquinas prefers to study economic arguments: what is a loan and what is money? Aquinas thus reviews the arguments of the authorities and, distancing himself from them, introduces the possibility of an error in the analysis and understanding of the economic activity. To do so he uses different means: since he gives three authorities' arguments, we may surmise that none of them is considered crucial. The authors remain anonymous and are introduced in a general way—“it is said that”—whereas when he gives credit to an authority, he does

so by name. Moreover, the most common argument is said to be *satis probabilis* (quite probable). ‘*Satis*’ has an ambivalent meaning; moreover, probability, before the emergence of the probability calculus, is not a “degree of certainty” as it is in Bernoulli's *Ars conjectandi* (1713).¹ Aristotle and Aquinas make a distinction of nature between the certain (apodictic knowledge, by demonstrative means) and the probable (persuasive knowledge, by a set of arguments).² Lexicon analysis thus shows that ‘*satis probabilis*’ means that the common argument against usury is not certain. Aquinas's first economic text therefore introduces, on the most important economic subject of the time, a doubt about our understanding of what this operation is.

1.2 Economic Activity as “Voluntary Exchanges”

The second epistemological point is the delimitation of what corresponds to what we today call economics. In his *Summa theologiae*, written at the end of his life, Aquinas broke new ground. In his early works there is no unified view of economic activities, and questions of trade and lending are scattered throughout these writings. The common distinction is between *oeconomia*, natural exchanges, and *chrematistics*, the activity of merchants, done for gain. His approach in this period is still focused on the social reputation of the agents. In the *Summa theologiae*, however, he makes an epistemological unification, focusing on the transaction and seeing points in common between exchange and loan, and between natural exchange and merchant's trade. He unifies all these activities as “voluntary exchanges” when he introduces the two economic questions:

We must now turn to the sins which concern voluntary exchanges. Firstly, fraud in buying and selling, and

The Economic Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Theological Issues and a Philosophical Framework to an Economic Understanding

Pierre Januard

secondly usury in lending. In the case of voluntary exchanges, we do not find another kind of sin that is distinguished from rapine and theft. (S. T., IIa IIae, q. 77, prol.)

We thus obtain an epistemological delimitation of economics: it gathers together activities of exchange that are voluntary activities, i.e. those that count neither as gifts, nor as theft or robbery. This leads us to two observations: first, Aquinas's economic framework is that of exchange, which is ruled by the virtue of justice, not that of gift, ruled by charity. Surprisingly, Aquinas is quite close to the anthropologists' approach according to which every gift calls for a counter-gift—so for an economist it is an exchange, not a free gift. The second point concerns the scope of the will in the idea of an exchange being voluntary. Aquinas sets internal and external boundaries to economic activities understood as voluntary exchanges: the internal boundaries are fraud and usury, the external ones theft and robbery.

1.3 An 'Ecological' Economic Epistemology

Economic activity is restricted to exchange. Aquinas addresses the different forms of exchange, but seems not to address production. The economic part of Aquinas's political work *De regno* sheds light on this through the issue of supply. Here he discusses the two sources of supply, namely local production and the arrival of foreign merchants. He points out the need for trade to provide supplies because a region cannot produce everything, but he prefers local production because of the transport risks such as "wars and the various difficulties of the road", and the social and cultural risks engendered by the presence of foreign merchants "brought up according to different laws and custom" and because of which "in the city, everything becomes venal". He has a negative view of merchants who "lead a life of pleasure", and trade, moreover, gives rise to gatherings and sedition (*De regno*, II, 7 (II, 3)).

Thus, although not for the ecological reasons pertinent for us today, Aquinas promotes short supply chains. In addition, though, he raises another and perhaps more fundamental question

regarding ecology and environmental issues. At issue here is not simply the preference between local supply and the dependence on merchants: more deeply, he leads us to ask *who*, or rather *what*, actually "produces". Although the economic sense of "production" and "producing" does not appear until the modern era, the verb "*producere*" appears twice in Aquinas's economic writings: once concerning alchemy (and not really in the economic sense), and once on trade and supply, in *De regno*: but here it is not the man but the *region* that is the subject of the verb "*producere*". Aquinas says: "But there are two ways of ensuring that a city has an abundance of things. The first, the one we have been talking about, comes from the fertility of a region producing [*producentis*] in abundance everything required for human life [...]" (*De regno*, II, 7 (II, 3)). As in the Bible (Genesis 1), it is the earth (or God) that produces. Man has to adapt to the fertility and abundance of the region. Receiving what the earth produces, man's work is then to transform, transport and exchange in order to satisfy his needs. This is consistent with the fact that in his various writings Aquinas always insists on exchange, and the work of craftsmen is always presented for the exchange that it enables (S. T., IIa IIae, q. 77, a. 3; *Ethicorum*, V, 8–9).

This leads to a kind of 'ecological' economic epistemology by reducing the scope of human activity to exchange. The justice of exchange insure that the fruit of the earth is to be shared among people in line with God's work of creation. Human beings acknowledge that production depends on the land and receive it with gratitude, not believing themselves to be all-powerful, all-possessing and all-creative.

2. Just Price : The Virtue of Justice Incorporated Into Economics

2.1 A Criterion for Justice Including Licit Expenses and Based on an Ontological Approach

Aquinas has a moral goal, but it has to be pursued in the absence of knowledge of the intention of the agent, which remains hidden. The price, then, allows him to circumvent the intention, as it constitutes a visible and objective

criterion of the justice of the exchange. Price corresponds to an equality of values: "the price of a purchase is given as a measure equivalent to what is purchased" (In IV Sent., d. 25, q. 3, a. 2, qc 1, resp.).

Readers of Aquinas often seek to understand what a just price is and to establish its level, but it is first necessary to determine what can or cannot be priced. The justice of exchange is part of an ontological approach to the good exchanged. Paradoxically, one of the most important keys to understanding Thomasian economic thought is his treatment of simony, the sin of selling a sacred thing or power. In the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Aquinas says:

If it is with respect to quantity [*in quantum*], then there is injustice [*injustitia*], as [*sicut cum*] when someone does not buy or sell at a just price [*non justo pretio*]; but if it is with respect to the object [*in quid*], as [*cum*] when he sells or buys what is not the object of a price [*quid non cadit sub pretio*], then it is the sin of the simoniac. (In IV Sent., d. 25, q. 3, a. 1, qc. 1, resp.)

The "*quid*", the nature of the good exchanged, governs the exchangeability of the good and the conditions of exchange, depending on whether the good is tradable according to a price, or to another kind of exchange ratio. Aquinas adopts an ontological approach to exchange, not an anthropological one: it is not the social reputation or the job of the agents, or even their intention, that determines the justice of the exchange, but the "*quid*". We note that there is a progressive lexical commodification, because thirteen years later, in the *Summa theologiae*, impossibility of pricing is expressed in terms of price level: "A spiritual thing cannot be compensated for by an earthly price [...] it is more precious than all riches" (S. T., IIa IIae, q. 100, a. 1, resp.; see also a. 3, ad 2). We find the same thing about the free man: "The person of a free man surpasses all pecuniary estimation" (S. T., IIa IIae, q. 189, a. 6, ad 3). The possibility of having a price becomes the possibility of having a fair level of price.

Another point of transition from philosophy to economics can be found on the subject of price treated through

the virtue of prudence. *De emptione et venditione ad tempus*, in a little-read passage, distinguishes between licit expenses, which the merchant can pass on in the sale price, and illicit expenses, which he cannot pass on. The cost of transport is licit: it is the merchant's own activity. Here, Aquinas says "*expensas [...] in portatione pannorum*" (*De emptione*, III), but ten years later in the *Summa theologiae* says "*periculum [...] transferendo rem de loco ad locum*" (*S. T.*, IIa IIae, q. 77, a. 4, ad 2), showing an improvement in his understanding of merchants' services: he goes from a cost (*expensas*) to a

risk (*periculum*) of shipwreck or robbery), and from a physical activity of carrying (*in portatione*) to an economic activity of moving goods (*transferendo*). Aquinas points out two kinds of illicit expenses (*De emptione*, III): expenditure on illicit activities, such as the cost of a loan to develop a business, and expenditure due to imprudence (prudence being understood as a virtue). He distinguishes two kinds of imprudence: expenses made by negligence (*incaute*), and mismanagement (*imprudenter*). This highlights two types of carelessness in management: lack of attention, and incompetence

leading to poor anticipation and forecasting. Although virtue-based and statistical approaches remain irreducible, prudence as a virtue is consistent with its contemporary approach in terms of probabilities. Indeed, imprudence here is behaviour that increases the risk of loss by a leftward extension of the curve (negative skewness) representing the probability density function.³

2.2 Understanding Just Price Through Sign and Analogy

It is possible to go yet further in the economic understanding of the just price from Thomasian philosophy and



theology. In *De emptione*, there is usury when fabrics are sold “more expensively than they are worth on the common market” (*De emptione*, II). The challenge is to articulate the price of justice that pre-exists, the price on the market and the price in the singular exchange.

First, the way that Aquinas uses the category of the sign in his theology concerning sacraments provides a new perspective: the sign (*sacramentum tantum*) is a visible sign of a sacred reality (*sacrementum et res*), itself a sign of an ultimate sacred reality (*res tantum*). For example, in the Eucharist the bread and wine are the sign of a sacred reality, the body and blood of Christ, which is itself the sign of an invisible reality, the gift of grace (e.g. *S. T.*, III, q. 73, ad 3). According to this pattern, the just price in the singular exchange is a sign of the just price on the market, which is the reality, but also a sign of the price of justice, which is unseen but which governs the whole chain.

As well as the sign, we can rely also on the category of *analogy*, developed in Aquinas’s philosophy of language for divine names (*S. T.*, Ia, q. 13, a.5). The just price is the price of justice, and by analogy the just price on the market and the just price in exchange. This allows the same name to be used for the three levels, without there being any identity, but rather conformity. In particular, we might envisage that, depending on the conditions of the exchange, there might be a set of acceptable prices⁴ that might all be just and conform to the price of justice. And we can add a juridical aspect. In the *Commentary on the Sentences*, concerning merchants, Aquinas says that trade must be “according a licit contact” (*In IV Sent.*, d. 16, q. 4, a. 2, qc. 3, resp.). So the just price is the just price in the singular contract and exchange, which is a sign and an analogy of the price according the positive law and contact rules and according to market, which is the sign and the analogy of the price of justice.

2.3 A Plurality of Exchange Ratios

We have seen that, according to their “*quid*”, their nature, some goods do not have a price. Although price—i.e. an exchange ratio between equal

values—is the common exchange ratio, there is room for other kinds of exchange as well. Commutative justice is *principaliter aequalitas rei* (*S. T.*, IIa IIae, q. 77, a. 1, ad 3), where the adverb “*principaliter*” may be understood as allowing limit cases with different exchange ratios. The very first occurrence of “just price” in Aquinas’s work shows the path of this plurality. This comes not in an economic but in a biblical and spiritual text. Aquinas comments on Isaiah 55, 1; and this is paradoxical because it is the biblical verse that seems most paradigmatic of giving: “buy and eat: come, buy without money” (Isaiah 55:1). Until the 13th century, this text was understood as referring to a gift, but Aquinas now comments: “‘Come, buy’, take as if you were buying, ‘even without money’, which is less than the just price” (*Super Isaiam*, 55, 1). He thus introduces a quantitative dimension, and when he comments on this verse again in his later commentaries on Matthew and John, he clearly understands Isaiah 55:1 as an exchange involving a counterpart, as we owe study and eloquence to God (*Super Matthaeum*, c. 25, *In Ioannem*, c. 6), which for a Dominican like Aquinas seems quite relevant. As human beings cannot pay an equal value to the grace of god, the exchange ratio is “less than the just price”. But God cannot be unjust and practice a price that is not just, and therefore the just exchange ratio is not a price in the sense of an exchange of equal values. There is another exchange ratio according to other criteria of justice: the currency must be available (study and eloquence) and the amount of the counterpart must be affordable.

Aquinas’s biblical and theological work on *Super Isaiam*, 55:1 is very useful in economics, because it allows us to address many limit cases of exchange, introducing the possibility of different kinds of exchange (not gift), with different ratios, calculated according to other criteria. The remuneration of the lawyer (*advocatus*) and of the medical doctor (*medicus*) must be moderate, “taking into account the personal condition of their clients, the cases handled, the work, and the customs of the country” (*S. T.*, IIae IIae, q. 71, a. 4, resp.). Although interest-bearing loans are forbidden, there are some kinds of

compensation available for the lender, called “*recompensatio*” or “*interesse*” in case of late repayment (*S. T.*, IIa IIae, q. 78, a. 2, ad 1; *De malo*, q. 13, a. 4, ad 14). This is also the case of the income of the merchant, which is not a wage, a price for work, but “like of stipend for his work [*quasi stipendium laboris*]” (*S. T.*, IIa IIae, q. 77, a. 4, resp.), and of the income of the priest, who doesn’t receive the “price of mass [*pretium missae*]”, but a living allowance called *quasi sustentamentum vitae or stipendium necessitatis* (*In IV Sent.*, d. 25, q. 3, a. 2, qc. 1, ad 4; *S. T.*, IIa IIae q. 100, a. 2, resp.). This possibility of a diversity of exchange ratios depending on the *quid*—the nature of the good or service exchanged—deserves to be explored in greater depth, because the contemporary economy is full of pricing conflicts which stem in reality from a lack of clarification about the nature of the thing exchanged and the kind of exchange ratio that would justly be applicable.

In conclusion, Aquinas’s thought led to major advances in our understanding of economic transactions. His moral quest led him to deepen his positive analysis of key economic situations. While his approach is part of moral theology, his thinking is fully relevant to economics. However, this properly economic contribution was only made possible thanks to a philosophical and theological foundation that provided Aquinas with the appropriate analytical tools.

NOTES

1. Jacob Bernoulli, *Ars conjectandi*, Basiliae Impensis Thurnisiorum fratrum, 1714, IV, 1, p. 211 and IV, 4, p. 225.
2. See for instance Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I, 1357a24–35; II, 1402b20–21; Thomas Aquinas, *In Post.*, I, 1
3. Miles S. Kimball, “Precautionary Saving in the Small and in the Large”, *Econometrica*, 58 (1), 1990, pp. 53–73.
4. André Lapidus, “Norm, Virtue and Information: Individual Behaviour and the Just Price in Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa theologica*”, *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 1 (3), 1994, pp. 435–473.

STUDI
CONTRIBUTIONS

Introduzione

La popolazione mondiale residente nelle aree rurali è stimata in oltre un miliardo di persone. Si tratta di una quota assai rilevante della popolazione globale, rispetto alla quale negli ultimi anni ha acquisito una rilevanza crescente il dibattito circa l'effettiva tutela dei diritti economici, sociali e culturali (DESC) di coloro che risiedono e lavorano in zone considerate, almeno in parte, svantaggiate rispetto a contesti territoriali urbani e peri-urbani.

I diritti economici, sociali e culturali puntano a creare le condizioni per un'uguaglianza sostanziale tra tutti i cittadini e sono definiti come diritti umani 'di seconda generazione' per differenziarli dai diritti di natura civile e politica. I DESC si riferiscono pertanto alla presenza di una serie di condizioni che possano garantire ad ogni persona un lavoro dignitoso per sé e per la propria famiglia, così come l'accesso a livelli soddisfacenti di educazione, protezione sociale, alimentazione e cure mediche nel quadro di un concetto generale di qualità della vita.

Le norme che fissano a livello internazionale i criteri e le modalità di tutela dei DESC e i relativi obblighi a carico degli Stati nazionali risalgono principalmente alla Dichiarazione Universale dei Diritti Umani, adottata nel 1948 dall'Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite. Nell'ambito della nostra analisi l'attenzione è stata posta sul caso dell'Argentina con la finalità di sondare il grado di rispetto dei DESC nelle aree rurali del paese sudamericano, rilevando in particolare l'impatto delle politiche agricole nazionali rispetto alle principali dinamiche sociali ed economiche che caratterizzano la vita della popolazione insediata nelle aree extra-urbane.¹

Politica agraria e diritti umani: un binomio essenziale per lo sviluppo delle aree rurali

Il rafforzamento complessivo dell'economia agricola di una regione rappresenta di per sé una base essenziale per rafforzare l'accesso ad alcuni dei principali diritti umani di seconda

La tutela dei diritti umani di seconda generazione nelle aree rurali dell'Argentina L'impatto della politica agricola nazionale sui processi di sviluppo territoriale

Luigi Pisoni

generazione, a partire dal diritto all'alimentazione, ad un lavoro dignitoso e ad adeguate condizioni di vita per le famiglie rurali.

Tra gli aspetti di politica agraria che portano indubbe conseguenze positive in termini di rafforzamento dei diritti economici, sociali e culturali possiamo menzionare le attività formative di carattere professionale. Un'altra area di intervento significativa per quanto riguarda la relazione tra politiche rurali e tutela dei DESC è costituita dalla cosiddetta 'agricoltura sociale', che si è affermata soprattutto nell'ambito del modello europeo di sviluppo agricolo a partire dai primi anni di questo secolo e che si può osservare, secondo modalità proprie dei contesti locali, anche in programmi di sviluppo rurale di diversi paesi dell'America Latina.²

Più in generale, l'implementazione di politiche pubbliche miranti a sostenere dinamiche legate all'imprenditorialità nelle aree rurali, l'occupazione e la sicurezza alimentare stimolano processi di sviluppo che favoriscono la tutela dei diritti fondamentali dei residenti.

Il caso argentino: sviluppo tecnologico e problematiche sociali

Un breve richiamo preliminare al concetto di ruralità può essere utile al fine di introdurre l'analisi relativa al rispetto dei diritti della sfera economica, sociale e culturale nel contesto argentino.

Tra le definizioni di ruralità riconosciute a livello internazionale ricordiamo quella adottata dall'Organizzazione per la Cooperazione e lo Sviluppo Economico (OCSE) che utilizza principalmente il criterio della densità della popolazione, definendo come rurali le unità territoriali che registrano una densità inferiore a 150 abitanti per chilometro quadrato.

Facendo riferimento ai criteri applicati nel continente sudamericano,

possiamo menzionare i canoni fissati dalla CEPAL, la Commissione Economica per l'America Latina (organismo dipendente dall'ONU), secondo la quale possono essere caratterizzate come rurali le aree con prevalenza di centri abitati con una popolazione inferiore a 2.000 abitanti.

Ad ogni modo, al di là di criteri meramente statistici, è opportuno ricordare una questione che può essere considerata emblematica della situazione del mondo rurale argentino: se da una parte l'agricoltura professionale del paese si trova in uno stadio avanzato di applicazione delle moderne tecnologie produttive, nondimeno la considerazione sociale di cui godono le zone rurali è tuttora considerevolmente bassa se paragonata, ad esempio, all'attenzione e all'appoggio che la società europea offre alle proprie comunità rurali.

Problemi di orientamento strategico nella politica agraria argentina

Uno dei principali aspetti che emergono esaminando l'insieme delle misure di politica agricola adottate dai governi argentini negli ultimi decenni riguarda la difficoltà di ricostruire un modello univoco di sviluppo rurale partendo dalle prassi di politica agricola osservabili, atteso che non si riscontra la presenza di una politica nazionale organica per il settore primario.

Il settore primario ha un ruolo centrale nell'economia del paese, in quanto rappresenta il 7,5% del prodotto interno lordo del paese e il 5,4% della manodopera privata regolarmente registrata. Il dato più rilevante riguarda peraltro l'ingresso di divisa straniera generato in Argentina dalle esportazioni di prodotti dell'agricoltura e dell'allevamento che, secondo una nota informativa ministeriale del 2020, ammonterebbero a oltre 36 miliardi di dollari.³

Un gruppo maggioritario di analisti sostiene che, da poco più della metà del ventesimo secolo ad oggi, le politiche

agrarie implementate dai governi argentini hanno favorito un modo di produzione 'capitalista' in agricoltura – basato su unità produttive di grandi dimensioni – a danno di piccoli e medi produttori legati al modello dell'agricoltura familiare, considerati di fatto come una categoria produttiva poco significativa e non rappresentativa degli interessi generali del paese.onterebbero a oltre 36 miliardi di dollari.⁴ Tuttavia, questo tipo di interpretazione semplifica eccessivamente la traiettoria del settore e non può essere considerata totalmente rappresentativa della politica agraria del paese.

Prendendo come riferimento il numero totale di 249.663 aziende agricole classificate dall'ultimo censimento agricolo nazionale ("Censo Nacional Agropecuario") argentino⁵, effettuato nel biennio 2018-2019, solo 12.813 aziende risultavano aver preso parte in qualche misura ad almeno un programma nazionale o provinciale per il settore agrario nel periodo di un anno compreso tra il 1° luglio 2017 e il 30 giugno 2018. Delle imprese partecipanti, solo 10.954 avevano percepito una qualche forma di aiuto statale. In termini relativi ciò equivale a dire che i differenti programmi per l'agricoltura finanziati con fondi pubblici coinvolgono unicamente il 5,1 % delle aziende agricole regolarmente censite nel paese, erogando aiuti diretti o indiretti ad una percentuale di operatori ancor più ridotta, pari al 4,3%. Si tratta di un quadro che mostra il ruolo assolutamente marginale della politica agricola argentina quale fattore di sviluppo economico e territoriale.

Appare pertanto evidente che, al di là del dibattito da lungo tempo in corso nel paese circa una presunta caratterizzazione ideologica della politica agricola argentina (a favore o contro un modello agro-capitalista), la politica nazionale per il settore si caratterizza principalmente per una netta carenza rispetto alla necessità di formulare indirizzi strategici sul futuro del mondo rurale.

In questo contesto, il fine principale rimane quello di mantenere un prelievo costante di valuta pregiata dalle imprese agricole con vocazione all'export, principalmente attraverso misure economicamente distorsive, quali dazi doganali sui fattori produttivi importati e prelievi sulle esportazioni dei prodotti agroalimentari nazionali. A ciò si aggiunge il fatto che il consistente apporto del settore agricolo alle casse

dell'erario non è reinvestito in politiche per lo sviluppo rurale, se non in forma totalmente congiunturale e percentualmente poco significativa, peraltro legata ad una visione tendenzialmente assistenzialista.⁶

Ripensare le politiche di sviluppo rurale in Argentina

L'esame, necessariamente breve, che abbiamo condotto circa gli aspetti maggiormente caratterizzanti del sistema agricolo argentino in relazione alle politiche nazionali per il settore, ci può consentire di ipotizzare alcune direttrici di riforma orientate verso l'obiettivo generale di un incremento nella tutela dei DESC nelle aree rurali dell'Argentina.

Senza dubbio, un deficit strategico della politica agricola argentina è da ricercare nella carenza di una visione sistemica, al di là della scarsa consistenza delle risorse applicate alle iniziative di sviluppo rurale. Per tale motivo di fondo, il raggiungimento di una gestione più organica delle politiche agricole nazionali si presenta come esigenza fondamentale al fine di riorientare e potenziare un sistema agricolo che, grazie all'abbondanza di risorse naturali dell'Argentina e alla vocazione imprenditoriale di una parte significativa delle proprie imprese, potrebbe occupare un posto di assoluta preminenza sui mercati internazionali.

In questa prospettiva, si considera quanto mai auspicabile la definizione di un livello equo di tassazione delle attività agricole che non pregiudichi le possibilità di crescita del settore nel paese sudamericano, evitando la tentazione di continui aggiustamenti nelle percentuali e nelle forme di prelievo che per diversi anni si sono susseguiti per tentare di ripianare i cronici deficit del bilancio pubblico argentino.

Nello stesso tempo, sarebbe indice di una politica agricola più razionale la predisposizione di piani pluriennali di finanziamento per il settore primario, differenziando opportunamente le erogazioni per investimenti strutturali dai sussidi a puro sfondo sociale.

Sul fronte dell'agricoltura familiare pare ragionevole affermare che la creazione di adeguati percorsi di crescita per decine di migliaia di unità produttive, i cui titolari vivono spesso in condizioni di mera sussistenza, costituisce una sfida tuttora aperta per l'agricoltura argentina. A tale proposito, para prioritario

associare obiettivi di crescita economica e azioni per la tutela dei diritti fondamentali della popolazione extra-urbana.

Al di là delle azioni di carattere più strettamente sociale che la citata legge n. 27.118/2015 offre attualmente ad un certo numero di piccoli produttori agricoli, per lo più legati alla cosiddetta economia informale, sarà opportuno definire percorsi di crescita imprenditoriale sostenuti da un incremento dei contributi pubblici per investimenti, in vista di un processo di razionalizzazione e riconversione della spesa pubblica per il settore.

Tra le misure che potrebbero aprire opportunità concrete di maggior tutela dei diritti di seconda generazione nelle aree rurali merita infine di essere richiamata la questione dell'insediamento di giovani agricoltori. L'erogazione di contributi a copertura di parte delle spese di avviamento di un'impresa condotta da giovani, la previsione di maggiori aiuti per investimenti realizzati da giovani nel quadro di programmi di sviluppo rurale già esistenti, l'accesso a percorsi di formazione professionale d'alto livello⁷, così come l'esenzione da alcuni carichi fiscali per le aziende condotte da giovani nei primi anni dalla loro costituzione, sono solo alcuni degli strumenti applicabili al fine di costruire un quadro favorevole alla generazione di nuovo capitale umano e professionale in agricoltura.

Conclusioni

Le riflessioni che abbiamo svolto circa il ruolo della politica agricola argentina rispetto alle dinamiche di sviluppo delle aree rurali del paese hanno dimostrato che, in termini generali, le misure adottate non hanno garantito un adeguato livello di tutela dei diritti economici, sociali e culturali delle popolazioni ivi residenti. Ciò implica conseguenze necessariamente negative in una serie di ambiti collegati all'esercizio di diritti fondamentali, quali l'ambiente, la salute, la formazione e la disponibilità di alimenti sani e dalle soddisfacenti qualità nutritive, oltre alle questioni vincolate con i temi della protezione sociale, del lavoro e dell'insediamento territoriale.

Data questa analisi di fondo, abbiamo potuto raccogliere elementi che evidenziano l'esigenza di dare corso a cambiamenti sostanziali nella politica agraria argentina come condizione di base per aspirare ad un maggior grado di prote-

zione dei DESC nelle aree rurali del paese.

In particolare, occorrerebbe raggiungere il macro obiettivo di un governo sistemico delle politiche pubbliche per il settore primario, al fine di stimolare una crescita imprenditoriale locale che coinvolga tutti gli attori locali in base ad una prospettiva duratura di integrazione economica e sociale.

L'abbandono di una pratica di politica agraria circoscritta ad una funzione di mero strumento di prelievo di gettito fiscale e la sua concreta riconversione verso un paradigma di tutela globale dei diritti rappresenterebbero aspetti essenziali di una futura visione strategica in grado di innescare processi di sviluppo a lungo termine delle zone rurali argentine.

NOTE

1. L'Argentina, come firmataria della Convenzione Americana sui Diritti Umani (1969), si è impegnata a rispettare e ad applicare quanto contenuto nell'art. 26 di quest'ultima (Sviluppo progressivo), che recita come segue: "Gli Stati membri si impegnano ad adottare misure, sia a livello nazionale sia attraverso la cooperazione internazionale, specialmente di natura economica e tecnica, al fine di conseguire progressivamente, con la legislazione o altri mezzi appropriati, la piena realizzazione dei diritti implicati nelle norme in campo economico, sociale educativo, scientifico e culturale contenute nella Carta dell'Organizzazione degli Stati Americani come emendata dal Protocollo di Buenos Aires, nella misura dei mezzi disponibili, per via legislativa o altri mezzi appropriati".
2. Con l'espressione 'agricoltura sociale' ci si suole riferire ad attività svolte da operatori attivi in territorio rurale che si caratterizzano per la presenza di forti componenti etiche e di inclusione sociale. Ne sono esempi i servizi di cura per anziani offerti in strutture rurali e i servizi orientati al reinserimento lavorativo di categorie svantaggiate.
3. Roccatagliata A. (2020), *Programa de Desarrollo Rural y Agricultura Familiar* - (BID 2470/OC- AR), Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Pesca, aprile 2020, p. 5, consultato in: <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/2/#search/agricultura?projector=1>.
4. Un'analisi critica intorno agli orientamenti della politica agricola argentina negli ultimi decenni è consultabile in: Jara, C.E., Rodríguez Sperat, R., Rincón Manrique, L.F. y Gómez Herrera A. (2019), *Desarrollo rural y agricultura familiar en Argentina: una aproximación a la coyuntura desde las políticas estatales*, in "Revista de Economía y Sociología Rural" (RESR), Numero 57, pagg. 339-352, Brasilia,

<https://www.scielo.br/j/resr/a/X-K6CgTQ5KjPtgmX-4b7q96sh/?lang=es>.

5. Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (INDEC), *Censo Nacional Agropecuario 2018. Resultados definitivos*, Buenos Aires, 1ª edizione aprile 2021, consultabile in: https://www.indec.gob.ar/ftp/cuadros/economia/cna2018_resultados_definitivos.pdf.
6. Tra i programmi ministeriali per il settore primario rientra il PRODAF (Programa de Desarrollo Rural y Agricultura Familiar), che ha come pubblico di riferimento produttori agricoli caratterizzati da carenze in termini di capitali, attrezzature e organizzazione aziendale. Al di là del nome, il programma non racchiude in sé una vera politica globale per le aree rurali. Si tratta piuttosto di una serie di misure tendenzialmente giustapposte le une alle altre e finanziate in modo irregolare. Tra gli sforzi più rilevanti compiuti in tempi relativamente recenti dal legislatore argentino con l'intento di stabilire un quadro di riferimento per lo sviluppo di micro, piccole e medie aziende agricole dev'essere menzionata la legge nazionale 27.118 del 28 gennaio 2015, definita *Ley de agricultura familiar* (Legge dell'agricoltura familiare). Tra i benefici più rilevanti che offre la legge è possibile citare l'accesso agevolato alle sementi e gli aiuti per l'ottenimento in uso di parcelle di terreni agricoli detenuti dallo Stato.
7. L'adozione di adeguate politiche formative in agricoltura dovrebbe essere considerata tra gli strumenti maggiormente efficaci in vista del raggiungimento di obiettivi di difesa dei DESC in una prospettiva di medio e lungo termine, considerando che tali politiche hanno un impatto rilevante in relazione ad almeno tre diritti specificamente riconosciuti dal *Patto internazionale sui Diritti Economici, Sociali e Culturali* delle Nazioni Unite del 1966: il diritto all'istruzione, il diritto al lavoro e il diritto di partecipare alla vita culturale e di godere dei benefici del progresso scientifico e delle sue applicazioni.

Riferimenti bibliografici

- Feito, M. C. (2016), *Aportes para una ley nacional: rol de la agricultura familiar para el desarrollo rural argentino*. Márgenes. Espacio Arte y Sociedad, 13(18), 61-71.
- Gruenberg, C., Pereyra Iraola, V. (2009), *El clientelismo en la gestión de programas sociales contra la pobreza*, in "Documentos de Políticas Públicas|Análisis", Numero 60, Buenos Aires.
- Herreno Hernández, A. L. (2009), *Derecho al desarrollo*, in: González
- Monguí, P. E., (a cura di), *Derechos económicos, sociales y culturales. Cátedra Gerardo Molina*, Bogotá D.C., Universidad Libre de Colombia.
- Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos (2010), *Cartilla básica sobre derechos económicos, sociales y culturales*, IIDH - San José, C.R.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos - INDEC (2021), *Censo Nacional Agropecuario 2018. Resultados definitivos*, 1ª edizione aprile 2021, Buenos Aires, ISBN 978-950-896-607-0, consultato in: https://www.indec.gob.ar/ftp/cuadros/economia/cna2018_resultados_definitivos.pdf.
- Lattuada, M. (2014), *Políticas de desarrollo rural en la Argentina. Conceptos, contexto y transformaciones*, in "Temas y Debates", ISSN 1666-0714, anno 18, n. 27, gennaio-giugno 2014, pagg. 13-47, <https://temasydebates.unr.edu.ar/index.php/tyd/article/view/274>.
- Lema, D. (2021), *Políticas agropecuarias y economía en la Argentina*, in "Ciencia Hoy", vol. 29, n. 173, dicembre 2020-gennaio 2021, pagg. 55-63, consultato in: <https://cienciahoy.org.ar/politicas-agropecuarias-y-economia-en-la-argentina-daniel-lema/>.
- Manzanal, M., & Schneider, S. (2011), *Agricultura familiar y políticas de desarrollo rural en Argentina y Brasil (análisis comparativo, 1990-2010)*. Revista Interdisciplinaria de Estudios Agrarios, 34(1), 35-71.
- Nogueira, M. E., Urcola, M. A., & Lattuada, M. (2017), *La gestión estatal del desarrollo rural y la agricultura familiar en Argentina: estilos de gestión y análisis de coyuntura 2004-2014 y 2015-2017*. Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Rurales, 2(4).
- Paoloni, L. e Vezzani, S. (2019), *La Dichiarazione ONU sui diritti dei contadini e delle altre persone che lavorano nelle aree rurali: prime riflessioni*, Federalismi.it - Rivista di Diritto Pubblico Italiano, Comparato, Europeo, Focus Human Rights N.1/2019, p.9.
- Spisso, R. (2022), *Medidas de acción positiva, los tratados de derechos humanos y los recursos para potenciar su aplicación*, Revista "LA LEY", AR/DOC/2739/2022, p.7.

Introduction

Poverty reduction and enhancing the wellbeing of people are the most crucial points of the Sustainable development Goals of the 2030 Agenda at international and national levels. In order to achieve these goals, the 3 dimensions that are Economic, Social and Environmental have to be addressed well. The interconnected 17 SDGs are unique and cover issues that affect all nations, whether they are developed or developing. By addressing the economic, social and development needs of the people, they aim to reach the desired better future for the next generation. Developed and developing countries have different strategies to achieve the SDGs, depending on their realities. For developing countries, whose economies depend on agriculture, giving attention to agricultural development and to the food system is a fundamental strategy for achieving the desired 2030 goals.

For developing nations like Ethiopia, agriculture remains the backbone of the livelihood of people and their food system. Sustainable development efforts must address the needs of the smallholding farmers who are the majority of the rural population. The smallholder farming system has continued to be the dominant model in the rural economy, with an estimated 15 million agricultural households in the country according to the 2015 report of Ethiopia's Central Statistics Agency.

After decades of focusing on the development of smallholder agriculture, poverty remains prevalent in rural Ethiopia. The majority of smallholders continue to face food insecurity, with low income and vulnerability to climate shocks. This illustrates that current smallholder farming systems pose structural challenges inhibiting sustainable rural livelihoods and broader progress towards development goals. The Amhara Region in Ethiopia reflects this national context. Smallholder farming continues to be the primary type of livelihood for most of the region's population. It contributes significantly to the crop and livestock-production that drives the region's

economy.

Despite their contribution, food security and nutrition has not improved. The economic development and wellbeing of the people is still low, while infant mortality and stunting due to malnutrition remain high. Women and children are especially affected by the low production and consumption of agricultural products. Research on how to move forward on food production and towards sustainable forms of agricultural development is needed in order to reach the desired goals of the 2030 agenda.

The purpose of the thesis on which this summary is based was to give a broad overview of Smallholder Farming and to conduct a study of their contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It was intended to provide technical details, highlight challenging areas, and provide clear guidance on accepted practices based on the economic, social and cultural aspects of the Amhara region. This research was conducted in a real-life context in relation to the social dynamics of the smallholding farmers of the Amhara Region.

The study demonstrates an interdisciplinary approach by examining agriculture through integrated lenses that incorporate the environment, infrastructure and institutions. This holistic framing aligns with calls for the transformation of smallholder farming through multidimensional policymaking. Overall, the study fills knowledge gaps and provides transferable lessons to guide sustainable solutions, enhancing smallholder welfare, productivity, and resilience across the Amhara region and in other regions in Ethiopia with similar contexts.

1. The Scope of Smallholder Farming

This section of the thesis included a broad range of literature in the review which will help to widen the scope of

knowledge to the selected area under investigation. This literature review will bring a clear understanding of Smallholding Farming and their contribution on the achievement of Sustainable Development.

1.1 Concept and Characteristics of Smallholder Farming

Concept of Smallholder Farming.

Across agricultural activities around the world, smallholder farming is a considerable dominant agriculture activity. Smallholder farming is still widely practised in most countries. The word "small scale" is used synonymously with "smallholding". There is no clearly stated and well-defined definition of smallholder farming. The most agreeable definition that we can find is that a "smallholding farmer is a producer who rears livestock, runs fisheries or produces crops on a limited scale which varies from 2 hectares to 10 hectares" (FAO 2012; Knight 2022).

From the above definition, we can see that the practice of the smallholding farmers varies in different agricultural activities. When it comes to land size, the main distinguisher of the segment "smallholding", the term "small" is relative to the size of farm in a particular society or community. When it comes to understanding who is producing how much of the global food supply, distinguishing between different scales/size and segments of "small-scale" becomes exceptionally important (FAO 2015).

Commonly, the term 'smallholding' or 'small scale' refers to a farmer who lacks extensive land and financial resources. Consequently, the definition and characteristics of small farming can vary from one country to another. Rapsomanikis (2015) classifies smallholdings based on land size, considering those with less than 2 hectares. However, this classification is not uniform across all countries; what is considered

Transforming Smallholder Farming in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia A Path to Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2023

Mulumebet Assefa Kassa

small in one country might be medium or large in another. According to FAO survey results, the average farm size in Asia is approximately 0.32 hectares, whereas in Africa, examples from Kenya and Ethiopia show relatively larger sizes of 0.47 and 0.9 hectares, respectively. In Latin America, smallholdings can exceed 2 hectares (2015).

Characteristics of Smallholdings

Smallholder farming can be distinguished from big or commercial farming in terms of their land size, production method, limited access to land and capital, the decision-making process and so on. Smallholders can be found across all sectors of agricultural production. Land size and family farming can be considered as key distinguishing elements. Typically, smallholders own relatively small plots of land and have limited access to additional land compared to commercial farms.

There are 570 million farms in the world and among them 72% have less than 1 hectare while another 12% have less than 2 hectares (FAO 2014). Most smallholders are in rural (villages) or remote areas with underdeveloped infrastructure, no proper roads, health facilities, market access, or schools. Smallholding farmers, besides farming to produce food for their household/family, generate other incomes through different economic activities. Smallholders make decisions about what they produce (what to plant, which inputs to use, amount for consumption or for sale) and about other non-production related activities (education, health, off farming activities and activities of their family).

One of the key criteria in smallholder farming, the use of different types of labour—whether from family members, hired workers, or other sources of capital—is occasionally mentioned in the literature, but rarely discussed (Cousins 2010). Family farming, as a key distinguishing element, is synonymous with smallholding. It involves organising agricultural activities, forestry, fisheries, pastoral activity, and aquaculture production within a family unit. This system relies predominantly on family capital and labour, with contributions from both women and men.

The family and the farm are intrinsically linked, co-evolving to combine



economic, environmental, social, and cultural functions (FAO 2014). According to the FAO's definition, family farming serves as a crucial identifier in smallholder farming, where family members constitute the primary source of labour, regardless of gender. Family members are experts in the manual equipment needed to prepare the land, build fences and plant beds. Household members spend a large share of their daily time on agricultural activity (Paloma et al. 2020). Family labour is over-used; most family members work on small parcels of land. In developing countries, families farm small plots: they face low labor transaction costs,

engaging more workers per hectare than in other types of farms.

Family farms have their own advantages compared to large and small-scale farms. Michael Lipton in his discussion paper: "The Family Farm in a Globalized World" explains the benefits of small farms in developing countries. According to him, in developing countries, where land and capital are scarce while labour is plentiful, small farms inevitably have a productive advantage over larger farms since they have lower labour-related transaction costs (Lipton 2005). In terms of production, more labour leads to higher productivity and output per hectare. If

labour is reduced or displaced, it impacts the farm production process and may lead to a shift in the composition of labour used in production. (Paloma et al. 2020).

Smallholders exhibit significant diversity rather than homogeneity. They are a heterogeneous group, characterized by variations in sex, age, education level, income, and other factors. Additionally, smallholder farming itself is highly diverse due to the wide range of biophysical conditions affecting crops and the diversity in management practices (Gil et al., 2019).

When designing policies and strategies, it is crucial to recognize the inherent heterogeneity of smallholders. Although they form a diverse group, policies often treat them as a single category for development purposes. However, overlooking their individual characteristics can have implications for their future farming and economic activities within regional or national economies.

1.2 The Importance of Smallholder Farming

Family farmers or smallholding farmers were already at the centerpiece of several discussions prior to the SDGs, which have led to many new activities

for rural transformation (Terlau and Hirsch 2015). For the implementation and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, smallholders become the center of discussion and designing policies.

Much of the SDG 2030 focuses on agricultural productivity. This allows many international organizations to organize many side events regarding smallholders and the sustainability of their social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Smallholders must be at the heart of the SDGs for their achievement, and their voice needs to be heard at all levels, as Harriet Lamb from Fairtrade International Organization has maintained. She has stated that “We must listen to smallholder farmers and workers. Delivering the Sustainable Development Goals requires the voices of smallholder farmers and workers to be heard at the highest levels of government and commerce” (Lamb 2015).

Smallholder farming can indicate the level of poverty, food security/ malnutrition, and wellbeing of the people involved. The direction of development of smallholder farming can be the cause or effect of forward and backward development. The smallholding farmers/households are on the development agenda, and at the heart of achieving the

SDGs, due to many factors. Their contribution to sustainable development can be on economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

Economic contribution

The contribution of smallholding farmers to economic efficiency is significant, since they generate a rural economy by spending most of their income in the local economy. Using a mixed method of land system, they produce more food per hectare compared to large-scale farming (“Small is bountiful”).

One of the factors is their contribution to the production of subsistence foods, which can help to reduce or stabilize price reduction. Smallholding farmers are the main food producers in developing countries; increased smallholder agricultural production means more food enters the marketplace, leading to lower food prices and better diets (Dioula et al. 2013).

The other factor is, they generate more chances for the poor and unskilled workers and provide food items to the local market. With more people moving to cities, demand on urban food markets will grow, which in turn can generate job opportunities in all agricultural activities or the food system in general.



Social contribution

The incidence of workers living with their families is associated with employment in agriculture (Murekezi et al. 2018). The social interaction of smallholders is high since more employees (family members and those who are hired) are engaged on a small piece of land. They are more creative, close to nature, creating joy for themselves and others, and this helps them to grow more in integrity.

Contribution to the environment

Some of the benefits of smallholding farming are environmental protection, social interaction, and personal growth. During production and harvesting time, which are more intensive, they use different methods to protect the land and the soil. Through reduced fossil fuel dependency and energy requirements, smallholders' traditional practices also mitigate climate change by decreasing emissions and improving the carbon level of the soil. (FAO 2012).

1.3 The Production Pattern and Market Participation of SHF

Smallholders produce subsistence/-consumed foods in most developing countries. A study published on world development shows that five of every six farmers in the world with less than 2 hectares operates on only around 12 percent of all agricultural land and produces roughly 35 percent of the world's food (FAO 2021). Another study shows that smallholders, generally with less than 2 hectares, produce 70-80% of the world's food crop production (Ricciardi et al. 2018).

Smallholders' production is not only measured in quantity but also in its diversification. This is mainly because they produce for their consumption and, to get better diets, they produce different items. Smallholder's production is influenced mostly by their consumption but sometimes also by the land and the farming system (rain-fed or irrigation).

Smallholding farmers are producers of food items; in the meantime, they are entrepreneurs in what they do, since they try to be creative to avoid the risk of losing income or of not having enough food for their families. The production pattern differs based on many factors, like land size, topogra-

phy, technology and agricultural inputs used. The purpose of production is for daily consumption and only a certain amount is used to get an income to provide other necessities (FAO 2021).

Most smallholders, in addition to crop production, have livestock, and with this they produce dairy products for their consumption and to sell on the market. In addition, livestock can be useful in preparing manure and other fertilizers for the land. The smallholders also make additional income by selling their livestock.

The amount of agricultural output produced is influenced by land size and the means of production. Factors such as population size (demography), and the distribution of rural and urban areas determine the extent of farming land available. The relationship between production levels and farm size is not always straightforward; most studies reveal an inverse correlation. George Rapsomanikis, in his analysis of small-scale agriculture, emphasizes "technical efficiency"—the maximum output produced by a given input bundle. Smallholders tend to be more efficient, achieving output levels closer to the maximum, compared to larger landholders (FAO 2015). Various factors contribute to this conclusion.

While smallholder farming is primarily based on subsistence agriculture, smallholders also participate in the market to generate income. Most of them sell their products to cover household expenses, particularly for essential items like food. However, they typically sell only a small portion of their overall production. The cost of participating in the market poses challenges for smallholders due to factors such as limited infrastructure, their modest production volume, and dispersed locations, which hinder access to mechanized market systems.

Access to markets varies for smallholding farmers, ranging from no access to limited or frequent access, depending on their location, available infrastructure, and the existing market system. Research indicates that the marketing system (food chain) significantly impacts the quantity and quality of production among smallholders.

In today's modern market, smallholding farmers face significant constraints. Selling through sophisticated channels requires both strong managerial skills

and consistent supply. Analysts agree that individual small farmers find it challenging to supply supermarkets due to stringent food safety requirements, timing conditions, and the preference for large-scale farmers who can better meet these demands (Reardon et al., 2003; Rapsomanikis, 2015).

1.4 Challenges Faced by Smallholding Farmers

There are a high number of people in the world living in poverty or extreme poverty, in hunger and with malnutrition. Safe water and sanitary facilities are fundamental in nutrition and wellbeing improvement. Lack of safe water and proper sanitation facilities lead to diarrhea; living constantly with it results in undernutrition. Diarrhea is one of the primary causes of death among children under 5 years of age (Rapsomanikis, 2015).

Though there are other factors to be considered, the connection between smallholding activity and the level of poverty, hunger and livelihood is direct. It is alleged that the structural form of poverty is deeply rooted in the socio-economic-political and cultural institutions of a society or nation.

Many Smallholding households own their own dwelling, but their living condition is poor or on a low level. Many of those households are extremely poor and many family members might live in small houses with little or no access to clean water, electricity, or proper sanitation facilities (FAO 2012; Rapsomanikis 2015).

Rapsomanikis gives examples from Kenya and Nepal. In Kenya, most houses have dirt floors (74%) and lack brick walls (13%). Few have electricity (5%), telephone (0.1%), or proper sanitation (1.5%). In Nepal, smallholders' houses may have proper toilets (32%) and some access to running water (8%). Most are built with bricks (70%), but only a few have non-dirt floors (12%) or electricity (27%) (2 0 1 5) .

The other main challenges in smallholder agriculture includes increasing productivity, diversifying production, adding value through processing, retaining a greater share of the final product value through improved marketing, and achieving environmental sustainability (Oxfam, 2000).

The right to property and the use of natural resources significantly influences smallholder farming. Klaus Deininger emphasizes the necessity of land rights, as they are crucial for motivating and enhancing productivity (2014). A lack of land rights can render smallholders vulnerable, ultimately affecting their ability to plan sustainable investments on their land.

Interestingly, while the number of smallholding farmers increases, the size of smallholding land (farmland) declines. This phenomenon occurs in countries where population growth outpaces the availability of additional land for agriculture.

1.5 The Future of Smallholder Farming

Smallholders are a major source of food for developing countries, especially for those that have an agriculture-based economy. In search of subsistence and healthy food, people can start farming in very small areas, even in a backyard. This makes smallholding farming sustainable compared to large farming and an important component of the plan of development.

Very recent studies show that there are 600 million smallholders around the world. They work on less than two hectares of land and are estimated to produce 28-31% of total crop production and 30-34% of food supply on 24% of gross agricultural area (Ricciardi et al. 2018). One of the main challenges smallholders can face is population growth and the need to increase production to meet the needs of the population.

Population growth increases the demand for food. As population rises, demand for food, energy, and income increases (Mekuria 2018). Increasing population, coupled with land degradation, aggravates the challenges to crop production (Mekuria 2018). This is especially true in the absence of adequate food production technology and integrated programs that simultaneously address community needs for food and productive health (PAI 2012). The current state of global security raises serious concerns as the number of hungry people has surpassed 1 billion people and emerging trends are further threatening global food supply (Fan 2010).

Conceptual links between population

growth and food security are further reinforced by studies examining the ability of the food production system to keep pace with long-term demographic changes in the developing world (UNDP 2012). Most of the countries with the highest number of people facing food insecurity also have high fertility rates and rapid population growth (PAI 2012). Sub-Saharan African countries are a good example. By 2050, even if fertility rates decline, the population of the region is projected to more than double, coupled with the lowest agricultural productivity in the world and the highest percentage of people living in poverty (PAI 2012).

The other challenges of smallholders are the use of natural resources without compromising the future. According to a policy paper by IFAD, across large parts of the developing world, the natural resources from which poor rural populations derive their livelihoods are being degraded or depleted through overuse, poor land management, and climate changes (2012).

Other factors like free trade, food supply chains and the need for sophisticated channels to make available food from producers to consumers are some of the challenges that the smallholders face to determine their future.

The smallholders' contribution to economic growth and development and climate resilience is significant. They are expected to produce more to fulfil the high demand for food created by unstoppable population growth and urbanization. The question is, how can they be at the heart of the solution with all the above challenges they face? What must be done to fill the gap between the production trend, the life of the smallholders, and the sustainability of their natural resources?

2. Challenges and Opportunities of Smallholder Farming in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia

Overview

The current study aims to analyse the livelihood patterns of smallholding farmers in relation to human development. It also investigates their contribution to the food system within the region and, more broadly, their impact on sustainable development in the Amhara Region and the country as a whole. The case study was conducted

in the North Shewa zone¹, based on predefined criteria for this research. A total of 180 smallholding households participated in the survey across three different districts (Ankober, Basona Worena and Merhabete districts, known locally as “Wereda²”).

From the case study and the survey conducted for the purpose of this research, several key findings have emerged. While all households encounter challenges across various survey categories, the impact and dimensions of these challenges on human development and livelihoods vary significantly among different selected districts in the research. Interestingly, some challenges are shared across households, while others disproportionately affect specific households within the same village and districts.

Based on data analysis and interpretation, the major findings of the current research largely address the initial research questions. Key institutional factors constraining smallholders include infrastructure gaps, limited external support services, financial exclusion, sociocultural rigidities that hinder gender parity, and risks related to natural resource degradation.

2.1 Major Challenges to the Smallholding farmers

Infrastructure and Access to Public Services

The findings indicate that households face severe constraints due to inadequate infrastructure, such as roads, water, and sanitation facilities. These limitations restrict access to basic services and economic opportunities. This observation aligns with existing literature emphasizing the critical role of infrastructure in inclusive rural development. Geographic isolation, highly pronounced in the Merhabete Wereda (district), worsens challenges for households, reinforcing the view that isolation increases vulnerabilities. Isolation contributes to factors that undermine self-reliance, weakening the capacity to absorb climate and market shocks without external assistance. Consequently, diminished autonomy extends vulnerability cycles, threatening intergenerational well-being.

Villages situated farthest from essential services are connected only by poor-quality earth roads, often impassable

ble during the rainy season. Multi-hour commutes on foot become the sole option for meeting basic needs and responding to emergencies. Isolation discourages social interactions and knowledge exchange—integral components of development. Limited market participation hampers incomes, while sparse access to healthcare threatens overall well-being.

Access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, and hygienic conditions is fundamental for human health and well-being. However, findings reveal significant gaps in these basic services within the study area. While water sources exist, the public tap model places heavy burdens on households in Merhabete Wereda Kebeles³ like Geren. Commutes of over three hours each way to fetch drinking water potentially compromise quality and expose households to risks. Limited private household connections exacerbate these challenges. Targeted interventions that bridge gaps through combined infrastructure-service delivery approaches, optimized for local contexts, hold the potential to strengthen capacities across diverse groups.

The Merhabete landscape, with its mountains, valleys, and rivers, complicates infrastructure rollout to remote communities like Geren⁴ Kebele. Concentrated efforts to improve infrastructure, particularly in remote areas, can reduce marginalization and promote inclusive development. Strategic prioritization, aligning infrastructure expansion with public service inclusion initiatives presented in clusters rather than isolated projects, may better address these constraints.

In summary, comprehensive infrastructure-led rural transformations remain crucial for equitably realizing the smallholder potential across different districts in the study area's agricultural hinterlands. Overcoming basic barriers systematically is essential in order to prevent certain smallholder communities from being left further behind.

The Effects of Production Factors on the Performance of Smallholding Farmers

Agricultural production factors are basic for smallholding farmers to perform well in their day-to-day activities. In this research, it has been

observed that households in the study area face challenges with regard to the main agricultural production factors like land, agricultural water, and farm inputs and equipment.

The Effects of Production Factors on the Performance of Smallholding Farmers

Agricultural production factors are basic for smallholding farmers to perform well in their day-to-day activities. In this research, it has been observed that households in the study area face challenges with regard to the main agricultural production factors like land, agricultural water, and farm inputs and equipment.

Land

Observations indicate that all groups vary in terms of average land size, quality, and distance from households. Geographic isolation made land management particularly challenging for households scattered across Merhabete's rugged terrain. Due to topographic variation, households in this location face challenges related to land degradation and fragmentation. Similar to Merhabete Wereda, the other districts in this research allocate a minimal portion of land to agricultural activity.

Degraded land quality poses a constraint, compromising the overall potential for limited land productivity.



A decline in quality seems to be associated with reduced returns per cultivated area. Although most households in the study area have small landholdings, those in Ankober have an even smaller number of hectares, limiting backyard cultivation expansion. Fragmentation further restricts households, forcing them to concentrate production on small backyard plots.

In contrast, distance and inconvenient access to farmland pose challenges for households in the Basona Worena district. Topographic factors also disadvantage some communities. Steep hillside plots have hindered mechanization and accelerated erosive processes, depleting soil nutrition over time. Prioritizing ecosystem-based adaptation initiatives to restore degraded hillsides is essential for safeguarding asset bases threatened by environmental changes.

People rely heavily on their livelihoods from the land, but its quality is getting worse and it is less able to bounce back from the challenges faced. To be truly resilient, we need solutions that fit the specific situation on the ground. Also, there are too many people for the limited land available. Some people have left to find better opportunities elsewhere, but relying on money sent back home is not a good long-term solution.

Land is a fundamental agricultural resource, yet it faces various constraints for smallholders. Population pressures, tenurial ambiguity, topographic variability, and agroecological blind spots are the major challenges related to land. Redistributive reforms to alleviate fragmentation appear overdue in restoring viable farm sizes. Additionally, tenurial ambiguity compromises investment incentives, while the lack of land certification jeopardizes access to credit—essential for expanding cropped areas or optimizing existing holdings through irrigation. Properly administered land registration systems represent a prerequisite for unlocking agricultural potential. Key findings warrant deeper discussion and further study.

Agricultural Water and Inputs

Agricultural input accessibility and effectiveness emerge as major themes impacting smallholder productivity and resilience. Chemical inputs, while bene-

ficial for some, pose affordability challenges, necessitating public support. Education has bridged misunderstandings related to the appropriate application of inputs, considering environmental concerns associated with overuse. Integrated nutrient management training has facilitated knowledge-driven transitions toward sustainability.

Scarcity of quality seed stock represents a primary inhibitor limiting optimal yields for many households. Findings from the research indicate that there is a lack of distribution of farm inputs in most villages and remote Kebeles. Additionally, external support for different Weredas and Kebeles is inconsistent. Among the three districts/Weredas in the study area, households in Kebeles far from administrative towns or main road connections face a lack of farm input support from external organizations. The absence of institutions dedicated to producing quality seeds worsens this issue. For instance, in Ankober Wereda there is no institute, leaving private sellers as the sole option, which many households find unaffordable. Consequently, these households rely on their own resources, especially for obtaining quality seeds.

Dependency on seasonal rainfall proves deeply problematic across the zone. Rainfed agriculture restricts production cycles, exposing households to climate shocks such as erratic rains and capping overall output potential. Surface water endowments—such as rivers, lakes, and mountains—cloud the relatively well-watered zone, offering underutilized yet potentially transformative resource bases. Proper infrastructure, such as irrigation works, could open substantial expenses to higher-value commercial cultivation and exports. River basins intersecting Merhabete fit this profile.

Using irrigation systems that tap into underused inland water sources can help expand farmland and stabilize crop production. As water scarcity increases due to climate change, it is important to speed up the use of surface water for irrigation. Even though communities live near rivers, there are not enough irrigation systems for small-scale farmers. A better approach is to manage water more holistically, taking advantage of the natural water resources in

the area. This can lead to more resilient agriculture that meets people's livelihood needs and ensures food security.

The study looked at how different economic approaches affect people's ability to sustain their livelihoods. The findings have shown that relying heavily on rain for farming makes production risky, especially when there are no safety nets for unpredictable weather and market changes. Also, depending solely on rainfed systems limits what farmers can produce, making it harder to respond to market opportunities. These risks affect rural economies, leading to reduced growth. To make households more resilient, other ways of making a living needed to be explored.

Inconsistent Policy and Institutional and Public Service Barriers

Institutional factors have emerged as key influences shaping smallholder prospects. The lack of external support systems, of access to financial services, and of cooperatives pose notable constraints. Government extension networks remain crucial conduits linking science to the field. However, findings reveal that households in remote areas like Geren Kebele of Merhabete district received disproportionately little technical assistance, failing to optimize practices. Barriers such as geographic remoteness impair equitable outreach due to overstretched rural extension quotas.

Results point to financial exclusion as a key vulnerability across households. The lack of access to basic financial services, including saving and credit as crucial aspects of financial inclusion, is a particular constraint on households in the remote areas. This underscores the importance of expanding financial inclusion and prioritizing remote communities, especially through decentralized mechanisms that leverage existing platforms and structures. Savings and credit products suited to local realities, with affordable repayment terms, hold the potential to boost resilience, investment and opportunity sets across households.

Financial inclusion ranks among the priority enablers for household investment and risk mitigation strategies. Yet, the lack of tailor-made services in remote communities presents a binding constraint. Distance and remote



location hinder households in the Merhabete and Ankober districts from accessing savings. Additionally, households face challenges in accessing credit, which is important for managing consumption and spending opportunity sets. Among these districts, Merhabete demonstrates the highest lack of external institutional support compared to other locations in the study. In contrast, the Basona Worena district generally reflects strong external support.

Lack of institutionalised savings schemes curtail strategic investment options making smallholders reliant on unpredictable remittance streams as sole cash injections. Using better financial tools is important for long-term planning, helping households move beyond just getting by.

Concerted multi-stakeholder efforts combining financial deepening with infrastructure expansion delivers synergies promising to strengthen households' capacities more sustainably. Complementary initiatives cultivating risk mitigating social capital likewise seems valuable. By extending these services to rural areas, financial institutions can ensure that rural dwellers are not excluded from the formal financial system and can participate in economic activities on an equal footing.

Empowering grassroots cooperatives and collective action models strengthens smallholder bargaining power and partnership options. Capacity building and leveraging social capital within community-based entities builds economic agency from the ground up. Better water availability, extension linkages, input access and savings buttress coping/adaptive mechanisms. Relatively stable livelihood platforms position households proactively, pursuing opportunities from innovations and investments.

Stronger institutional incorporation and asset bases seem to expand households' resilience in Basona Worena. There are different co-operatives in all the Kebeles of the district. This helps them to work collaboratively to buy farm inputs and to sell their produce via the co-operatives. In addition, they are better mechanized than other districts. There is better cooperation among households in production, in harvesting and in sales strategy. Conversely, households in the other districts show less or no collaboration or collective action among households.

Traditional informal mechanisms can only marginally fill the emerging gaps. In this regard, collaboration and collective action among households in the Merhabete Wereda is mostly limited, with no formal organizational support. Households in the remote Kebele of the district like Geren demonstrate the greatest lack of external institutional support, compared to other groups in the study. In contrast, households in Basona Worena and some parts of Ankober districts demonstrate a generally strong status, reflecting good external support.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors

Sociocultural dynamics emerge as an important yet under-examined influence shaping smallholder prospects. Traditional practices reflect attempts to secure subsistence, however optimal productivity is inhibited by insufficient leveraging of indigenous ecological knowledge. Sociocultural norms appear to influence behaviours across groups through established preferences, risk-aversion and information asymmetries, impairing complete agency. Variations stem from geographic, economic and developmental variance, producing diverse exposure levels that mediate the impacts of social conditions across communities.

Based on the analysis and findings presented, all households under the study demonstrate sociocultural constraints related to agricultural practices and food consumption to a great degree. This is mainly due to the cultural practices they share and the religious commitments of the households. Cultural habits act as significant barriers to dietary changes needed for nourishing populations, especially considering production limitations.

The limited variety of consumption compromises nutritional outcomes across households heavily reliant on their own harvests for nourishment. Maternal situations suffer as a result, undermining development potential across generations. Unchanging attitudes reinforce weaknesses in the system, leading to a never-ending cycle of poverty caused by the interaction between cultural tendencies and economic realities.

Breaking restrictive norms, emphasizing agricultural transformation and enhancing the commercial focus of farms, aligned with expanding

dietary/nutrition demands, is enabled by rising prosperity. Enlightened engagements through community consultation, reconstructing the relationship between cultural traditions and objectives towards improvements thus rank among the priority needs for activating behavioural change.

Illiteracy depressed participation in production/consumption decisions is concentrated disproportionately in male domains of influence. Cultural norms that prioritize males require transformational shifts to redress imbalances. Engaging cultural institutions to bring about change holds promise. Integrated multi-sectoral approaches can accelerate the redressing of entrenched disadvantages across genders.

Historically, men have had more exposure to capacity development programmes, limiting women's access to valuable knowledge that could benefit household livelihood strategies. Rigid social norms have disempowered women, restricting their ability to navigate an increasingly unpredictable environment. Effective initiatives are urgently needed to build skills and confidence, addressing the root causes of exclusion.

Women's empowerment prominently features within sustainable development agendas. Findings underline the persistent obstacles across various dimensions that impair their full participation. Pronounced gender asymmetries appear normatively embedded into the social system, constraining the choices available to women for shaping their own destinies. Persistent gender disparities across groups are reflected in the divergence between men's and women's education status. Gender disparities in literacy stand out as a key finding warranting deeper discussion and further investigation.

All groups studied in the research demonstrate behavioural rigidities that impair the flexible responses required to improve livelihoods sustainably over the long term. Addressing these contextual difficulties is important for designing culturally sensitive developmental blueprints.

Heavy Incidence of a Subsistence Economy and a Lack of Strategy

From the findings, it is observed that most people derived their primary incomes entirely from fragile rainfed

harvests, leading to chronic insecurity as climate variability intensifies. Limited alternatives and weak safety nets reinforce the downward vulnerability that minor risks or disturbances may unleash.

Subsistence orientations have arisen from necessity but have limited potential for growth. Monocropping is primarily aimed at stabilizing household consumption, yielding minimal surpluses for value creation. Limited engagement in high-value markets restricts earnings, reflecting infrastructure gaps that hinder commercial development. Focusing on immediate needs results in minimal surpluses available for crucial long-term investments in productivity enhancement.

Flexible production arrangements, incompatible with changing demands, disrupt supply chains. Lack of knowledge transfer in polyculture limits options for mitigating climate volatility through species diversification. Moreover, limited off-farm opportunities hold back full diversification away from a single-string agrarian approach. Therefore, diversification has emerged as a key resilience strategy.

However, the findings show various hurdles that slow portfolio shifts across smallholders' agricultural activities. Capacity gaps compound the inability to participate in high value chains requiring strict standards. The lack of crossbred livestock constrains the opportunities for mixed farming. Inadequate institutional support, inhibiting optimized asset accumulation, has likely perpetuated these constraints. Resource deficiencies prevent the creation of larger livestock holdings or the processing ventures essential for creating regular incomes and stabilizing consumption.

Investing systematically in expanding human, social, natural, physical, and financial capital bases through customized programmes, is important for creating more balanced livelihood portfolios. Without alternative income sources beyond risky single activities, escaping poverty remains challenging. Concerted action across a range of activities, including livestock breeding, skills training, infrastructure development and collective initiatives thus appear indispensable elements for building pathways out of the current low-level equilibrium, through multi

plying opportunities and creating additional risk cushions. Such integrated enabling frameworks promise transformative impacts aligning smallholder success with sustainability objectives.

Comprehensive strategies facilitating a milieu conducive to inclusive rural transformation stand out as prerequisites for optimizing smallholder participation in commodity value chains and for promoting overall economic growth in agriculture-dependent settings. Capital injections across various realms hold immense potential for progressively overcoming the constraints that hold back the evolution of livelihoods and the general improvement of welfare across remote village communities.

2.2 Integrating Research Findings into the SDG and the Amhara Region Development Plan

Linking Findings to the Sustainable Development Agenda

Many constraints identified directly impact progress on crucial SDGs related to poverty, food security, health, education, water/sanitation, gender equality and environmental sustainability that are foundational to smallholder prosperity. Persistent barriers threatening lives and livelihoods from multiple angles demonstrate the interlinkages between humanitarian and development challenges that must be resolved through integrated solutions attuned to local realities.

For example, productivity-constraining factors like poor market access, gaps in agricultural inputs, land degradation and water scarcity undermine the achievement of SDGs 1 and 2 aimed at eradicating poverty and hunger. Limited health awareness and infrastructure jeopardize SDG 3 on well-being, while gender disparities and educational barriers impair progress across goals devoted to inclusion and empowerment.

These findings highlight that transformative interventions must simultaneously strengthen human, social, physical, natural, and financial capitals if resource-dependent communities reliant on the land are to realize their full potential and build resilience against unfolding climate threats. Narrow interventions are unlikely to remedy systemic deficiencies perpetuating vulnerability across generations through complex feedback dynamics.

Moreover, evidence underscores

that sustainable futures depend on tailored, localized solutions that genuinely empower communities as active agents of change, able to navigate transforming conditions through diversified, rights-based livelihood options, optimized around natural resource stewardship. Top-down approaches that ignore grassroots agency risk jeopardizing the long term sustainability of development outcomes.

Above all, findings emphasize the urgency of multi-stakeholder coordination for delivering integrated development, enabling an environment conducive to human flourishing within planetary boundaries. Unless binding constraints are alleviated proportionately across remote yet vitally important agrarian regions, prospects appear slim for Ethiopia and other nations to achieve the systemic transformations envisioned under the 2030 Agenda.

In summary, this analysis sheds light on the constraints faced by human progress, which sustainable development aims to address through integrated, people-centred approaches. Lessons from the study can inform more impactful policies and programs, emphasizing the crucial role of smallholders in advancing the Amhara region's developmental goals. Customized, innovation-driven approaches tailored to livelihood contexts offer an optimal pathway for transformative progress.

Research Findings and the Development Plan of the Amhara Region

The regional 10-year plan and Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) emphasize poverty reduction, food security, employment, and resilience. Targeted interventions integrating WASH (Water and Sanitation), health, and nutrition could help boost smallholder productivity and mitigate risks, as implied in the plans. However, the research highlights how smallholders still face numerous constraints related to land, inputs, markets, and training, which hinder productivity improvement and lower incomes.

The study also reveals vulnerabilities among smallholders concerning food security, nutrition, and resilience. The findings suggest that more attention may be necessary to ensure the equitable provision of essential services across communities. Additionally, limited infrastructure access emerges as

a key challenge exacerbating other issues for certain groups. Addressing these barriers in an integrated manner could better support agricultural transformation, as envisioned in the plans.

The Amhara regional strategy focuses on industrialization, but this research highlights the challenges faced by smallholders in markets and the need for opportunities to improve their livelihoods. The regional strategy should rather better prioritize support for smallholders in integrating into markets and fostering entrepreneurship.

The environment is one of the dimensions that must be addressed in order to have a sustainable form of development. In this regards, environmental sustainability is highlighted in both national policies and research findings. However, findings showed more work may still be required regarding natural resource management training, input use and land degradation mitigation in order to advance sustainability goals.

The findings suggest that customized strategies should be developed, especially for marginalized communities. These strategies should involve active collaboration with communities to optimize diverse livelihoods in harmony with natural resource management. Imposing top-down directives that do not align with local contexts and priorities can lead to unsustainable and unfair systems, jeopardizing long-term development goals.

Addressing these localized, interconnected vulnerabilities through multifaceted solutions offers an opportunity to galvanize more inclusive, productive food systems, supporting the region's rural transformation agenda aligned with Ethiopia's commitment to achieving the 2030 SDG targets through people-centred pathways.

This research provides empirical evidence underscoring the continued prioritization of the smallholder sector as implied in the plans. However, it also highlights specific intervention areas that require renewed focus to better operationalize those policies and advance regional SDG achievement. A multisectoral approach must be implemented. The study findings emphasize inadequacies that demand modified conceptualizations, better capturing structural impediments, and call for concerted action across sectors to unlock untapped drivers of progress.

Key Takeaways /Endnote

The study has highlighted various opportunities and strengths among smallholder groups, especially related to social capital and indigenous knowledge. Despite the challenges faced by smallholders, the study shows that their social capital and indigenous knowledge can contribute to their role as the backbone of the region's economy.

The study suggests that strengthening human, social, natural, physical, and financial capital in an integrated way could help boost smallholder productivity, food security, income diversification, and overall resilience. The findings emphasize the need for context-specific solutions co-created with farmers in order to overcome localized barriers against the SDGs.

The interpretation and discussion provides a micro-level perspective, contrasting somewhat with national level statistics that depict agricultural progress. The findings suggest that

aggregate portrayals can sometimes hide inequalities, emphasizing the need for a disaggregated understanding to ensure fairness. For example, statistics describing the overall crop yield across the region can seem fine on average. But this can cover up that certain marginalized groups or remote communities, have much lower yields than others, masking inequalities between different groups within the larger population.

The findings can inform the better targeting of policies, institutions and investments to improving the lot of marginalized smallholding communities, through coordinated, multi-stakeholder approaches. A multi-dimensional approach is needed to address inter-linked barriers related to infrastructure, institutions, environment, gender, and market access.

3. Pathways to achieving the SDGs by 2030

The findings indicate that smallholder farming plays a major role in the food

system and economy of the Amhara Region, significantly contributing to crop and livestock production. Despite their substantial contributions, most smallholders have not experienced meaningful improvements in their livelihoods and well-being. The current food system, which relies on smallholders, has serious problems. To achieve its development goals, the Amhara region must address these issues. If left unaddressed, these challenges will worsen vulnerabilities and slow down sustainable development.

Smallholders face obstacles due to traditional practices, climate vulnerability, lack of infrastructure, and cultural factors. These challenges affect their ability to ensure food and nutrition security. Unfortunately, these persistent issues also hinder progress on several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those related to poverty, hunger, health, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. To



address these complex constraints and achieve the SDGs, a comprehensive and holistic approach is needed. Focusing solely on agriculture will not be enough.

While open to improving practices, transformative changes will take sustained, coordinated efforts across sectors over the long term. Priority action areas include strengthening cooperative structures for access to finance, technologies, and markets; expanding climate-smart production through extension and appropriate inputs; developing processing and storage to reduce post-harvest losses; diversifying diets and livelihoods through nutrition education programs; and investing in multi-purpose rural roads, energy, education, and health facilities. For sustainable impact, stakeholders must participate in an inclusive planning process to address underlying cultural dimensions and design context-specific strategies. Demonstrated best practices can guide intervention models if adapted locally through an integrated approach.

An integrated approach combines essential ‘hardware’—like infrastructure improvements—with ‘software’ interventions that enhance human capabilities and build institutional capacity. This involves coordinated action across different sectors and administrative levels, tailored to specific contextual needs. A key focus is the empowerment of smallholders, encouraging their active participation in driving localized solutions.

By addressing interlinked smallholder challenges holistically, such an approach can catalyse inclusive rural transformation in alignment with sustainable development. It necessitates partnership between actors in the private sector, civil society, and communities. Further research on integrated programming can help strengthen the evidence base towards impactful policies supporting prosperous, resilient smallholders who are essential to progress at regional and national levels.

Multi-sectoral Coordination

Using integrated approaches across different sectors and involving various stakeholders, we can address interconnected challenges holistically and align efforts for greater impact. By coordinating efforts and forming partnerships across sectors and administrative levels, from regional government down to local

communities, we can foster essential collaboration among multiple stakeholders in order to transform smallholder farming.

The findings indicate that a one-size-fits-all policy and strategy to design and implementation will not work. Differentiated strategies are needed, considering each group’s unique constraints and capabilities. The focus should be on unlocking inherent potential through coordinated, multi-sectoral interventions.

Here are some suggestions on how the regional government can identify and promote differentiated strategies based on the realities of smallholder households in the different groups that have been analysed:

- Conduct localized research/analysis to thoroughly understand all context-specific challenges and opportunities. This could involve, among other techniques, focus group discussions, household surveys and key informant interviews.
- Set up an inclusive consultative process engaging diverse stakeholders – farmers, experts, civil society – to identify needs and priorities.
- Support participatory rural appraisals enabling communities to self-analyse their realities and identify solutions.
- Provide resources and flexibility for decentralized bottom-up planning based on local priorities.

A paradigm shift towards comprehensive strategies holistically addressing economic, social, institutional, and environmental conditions through equitable stakeholder participation is required. Integrated interventions strengthening production foundations, market partnerships and adaptive capacities while safeguarding natural, social, and human capital bases over the long term are vital. Moving smallholder agriculture from sole dependence on rainfed subsistence practices to more market integrated and resilient systems necessitates ‘Marshall Plan’ scale investments across infrastructure, inputs, value addition and collective action. Comprehensive support frameworks recognizing heterogeneous realities through localized bottom-up approaches are imperative.

General Conclusion

The purpose of this research has been to explore how the current food system, which relies on smallholder farming, impacts sustainable development in the Amhara Region, Ethiopia. Specifically, it has examined the role and challenges faced by smallholding farmers within this system and how this affects the ability of the region to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Additionally, the study aimed to identify strategies that can enhance their contribution to sustainable food systems and livelihoods, aligning with the SDGs.

An analysis of different documents and policies has found that Ethiopia's development strategies rightly prioritize agriculture-led industrialization and aim to modernize smallholder farming through the ADLI (Agricultural Development Led Industrialization) framework. However, implementation challenges, a lack of coordination across sectors, and insufficient focus on different dimensions risk undermining progress. Food and nutrition insecurity persist despite agricultural contributions to the national economy.

Despite all the constraints and challenges, opportunities exist to upgrade smallholding systems through integrated interventions customized to community contexts. The analysis has highlighted opportunities to build on social capital strengths, indigenous knowledge, and external linkages to enhance productivity, incomes, and long-term sustainability. While changes will be gradual, targeted efforts across sectors can offer hope for the realization of smallholders' potential role in food systems and development. Success will depend on accelerating integrated progress toward overcoming challenges of risk, access, and empowerment. Future research can lend deeper insights into nutrition, indigenous knowledge systems, women's roles, livelihood strategies and natural resource management.

In conclusion, the current smallholder farming systems in the Amhara Region present significant challenges to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Transforming these systems and improving smallholder welfare will be an evolutionary, long-term process requiring committed coordination across all relevant sectors

and levels based on the priorities and realities of smallholders themselves. If addressed comprehensively through multi-dimensional and people-centred approaches, smallholders possess great potential to develop more sustainable and equitable food systems, contributing to regional and national sustainable development.

NOTES

1. Zone: a second administrative level in the regional legislation
2. Wereda: a third administrative level in the regional legislation
3. “Kebele” is the lowest administrative level of the government; it is a subunit of a Wereda.
4. “Geren” is the name of a Kebele in Merhabete Wereda; it is one of three Kebeles selected for the case study.

Bibliography

- CENTRAL STATISTICS AGENCY (CSA). 2007, “The 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Statistical Report at National Level”. CSA, Addis Ababa
- 2007, “Census Report of 2007 of Amhara Regional State”. CSA pdf, Addis Ababa
- COUSINS, Ben. 2010, “What is a “smallholder”? Class-analytic perspectives on small-scale farming and agrarian reform in South Africa. Working Paper 16.” *University of the Western Cape*. Retrieved 02.02.2023
- DEININGER, Klaus. 2014, “Land rights, human capital, and income distribution.” In *Inequality: Causes and Consequences*, edited by L. Keeley, 42–70. Bingley, UK. Emerald Publishing.
- DIOULA, Bader Mohaman, Helene DERET, Julien MOREL, Etienne DU VACHAT, and Victor KIAYA. 2013, “Enhancing the Role of Smallholder Farmers in Achieving Sustainable Food and Nutrition Security”. *FAO*, Rome.
- FAN, Shenggen. 2010, “Achieving Sustainable Food Security: New Trends and Emerging Agenda.” New York. Retrieved 22.07. 2021 (https://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_pdfs/csd-17)
- FAO. 2012, *The State of Food and Agriculture: Investing in agriculture for a better future*. Rome - 2014, *Youth and agriculture: Key challenges and concrete solutions*. Rome. - 2015, *The economic lives of smallholder farmers: an analysis based on household data from nine countries*. Rome Italy. - 2021, *World Food and Agriculture - Statistical Yearbook 2021*. Rome.
- FAO, “Small family farmers produce a third of the world’s food. FAO - News Article: Small family farmers produce a third of the world’s food.” *FAO*. Retrieved 25.09.2021 (<https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1395127/icode/>)
- GIL, Rodrigo, Carlos Ricardo BOJACA, and Eddie SCHREVEENS. 2019, “Understanding the heterogeneity of the smallholder production system in the Andean tropics- The case of Colombian tomato growers.” *NJAS-Wageningen Journal of Life Sciences* 88, 1–9.
- IFAD. 2012, “Environment and Natural Resources Management: Resilient Livelihood through the Sustainable Use of Natural Assets.” ([dc466325-ba8d-4254-8c83-35e17fb62b88](https://www.ifad.org/publications/466325-ba8d-4254-8c83-35e17fb62b88) ([ifad.org](https://www.ifad.org/)))
- KNIGHT, Aimée 2022, “What is a smallholder farmer?” *Global Agriculture*. Retrieved 22.10. 2022. (<https://www.heifer.org/blog/what-is-a-smallholder-farmer.html>)
- LAMB, Harriet. 2015 “A speech at UN meeting on Sustainable Development Goals” (July 15, 2015) (<https://www.fair-tradeamerica.org/news-insights/fair-trade-america-speaks-at-un-meeting-on-sustainable-development-goals/>)
- LIPTON, Michael. 2005 “The family farm in a globalizing world: The role of crop science in alleviating poverty. 2020 Discussion Paper No. 40”. *IFPRI*. Washington, D.C. (<https://www.ifpri.org/publications/family-farm-globalizing-world>)
- MEKURIA, Wuletaw. 2018, “The link between agricultural production and population dynamics in Ethiopia: a review.” *Adv Plants Agric Res*. 2018;8(4):348–353.
- OXFAM. 2000, *Smallholder market-oriented agriculture: Constraints and opportunities*. Oxfam GB, Oxford.
- POPULATION ACTION INTERNATIONAL (PAI)., “Why Population Matters to food Security”. Retrieved 24.11.2022 (<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/files/-content/docs/e>)
- PALOMA, Sergio Gomez y, Laura RIESGO, and Kamel LOUHICHI. eds. 2020, *The Role of Smallholder Farms in Food and Nutrition Security*. Cham, Switzerland, Springer
- RAPSOMANIKIS, George. 2015, *The economic lives of smallholder farmers: An analysis based on household data from nine countries*. FAO.
- REARDON, Thomas, Peter TIMMER, Christopher BARRETT, and Julio BERDEGUÉ. 2003, “The Rise of Supermarkets in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*. 85. 1140–1146.
- RICCIARDI, Vincent, Navin RAMANKUTTY, Zia MEHRABI, Larissa JARVIS, Brenton CHOOKOLINGO. 2018, “How much of the world's food do smallholders produce?” *Global Food Security*, Volume 17, Pages 64–72, ISSN 2211-9124.
- TERLAU, Wiltrud and Darya HIRSCH. 2015, *Sustainable Consumption and the Attitude Behaviour Gap Phenomenon—Causes and Measurements towards a Sustainable Development*. *Int. J. Food Syst. Dyn.* 2015, 6, 159–174.
- THE FDRE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AFFAIRS OFFICE. 2015, *The Ethiopian Renaissance: An Overview of Ethiopia’s 2nd Growth and Transformation Plan*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: The FDRE Government Communication Affairs Office.
- UN. 2005, *Designing Household Survey Samples: Practical Guidelines*. NY, UN.
- UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP). 2012, *Africa Human Development Report 2012: Towards a Food Secure Future*. New York, UNDP.

1. Introduction: Neither God nor Law? An Unfounded Prejudice

China turns out to be the West's 'other' par excellence, as the current international conjuncture has revealed on more than one occasion. For centuries, the Chinese universe has posed many different questions to the Western gaze, as demonstrated by the plurality of studies and disciplines that, in various capacities, deal with the case of China. A fact of absolute importance, China has been, and still is, an immense test-bed for Christianity. What the well-known historian A.J. Toynbee wrote more than sixty years ago proved prophetic:

Instead of trying, as we have been trying since their day, to disengage a secular version of the Western civilization from Christianity, the Jesuits tried to disengage Christianity from the non-Christian ingredients in the Western civilization and to present Christianity [...] to the Chinese, not as the local religion of the West, but as a universal religion with a message for all mankind. The Jesuits stripped Christianity of its accidental and irrelevant Western accessories, and offered the essence of it to China in a Chinese, [...] intellectual and literary dress in which there was no incongruous Western embroidery to jar on Asian sensibilities. This experiment miscarried at the first attempt through the fault of domestic feuds within the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church of the day, which had nothing to do with either Christianity or China [...]; but, considering that [...] China and Christianity are all still on the map, we may expect—and hope—to see the experiment tried again. The recent victory of Communism in China over a Western civilization divorced from Christianity is no evidence that, in China, Christianity has no future in a coming chapter of history which today is still below our historical horizon.¹

After more than half a century, the Church seems to have accepted Toynbee's invitation-prophecy, has taken an interest, and has set itself in the direction of a meeting that would really put the role of Christianity in Chinese soil on the agenda. The most recent ecclesial fruit of this mutual search has produced the brief but dense provisional *Communiqué* of 22 September 2018 between the Holy See and the Government of the People's Republic of China; this text

is the fruit of a gradual and reciprocal rapprochement, has been agreed following a long process of careful negotiation and foresees the possibility of periodic reviews of its application. It concerns the nomination of Bishops, a question of great importance for the life of the Church, and creates the conditions for greater collaboration at the bilateral level. The shared hope is that this agreement may favour a fruitful and forward-looking process of institutional dialogue and may contribute positively to the life of the Catholic Church in China, to the common good of the Chinese people and to peace in the world.²

Why China? On a closer inspection, there is more at stake in the Celestial Empire than just a question of the meeting of cultures. First and foremost, there is a serious *metaphysical* topic. Some have argued that the very nature of Chinese language and thought precluded the development of certain philosophical (or theological) concerns in ancient China, such as the notion of truth, transcendence, substance, soul, God. It is often heard that the Chinese language is primarily pragmatic, bent on action, incapable of formulating abstractions. The well-known sinologist Marcel Granet argued that Chinese characters are «symboles plus puissants pour orienter l'action qu'aptés à formuler des concepts, des théories ou des dogmes»³, concluding his best-known essay by synthesising Chinese thought with the terrible formula «ni Dieu, ni Loi».⁴

We wonder whether such peremptory judgements are more a prejudiced assumption than the result of actual analysis. One might ask what would have prevented early Chinese thinkers from developing concepts identical to, or at least akin to, those of Western thinkers, especially those fundamental to philosophical discourse such as the distinction between being and non-being, reality and appearance, God and the world. Why could this variety of concepts not have existed in Chinese thought?

On closer inspection, recent sinological literature seems to say otherwise, or at least leave open the hypothesis.⁵ Not only that. We have been accustomed, especially in the contemporary West, to a *logical* truth, to an often *propositional*, *analytical* conception of truth, which is certainly a fundamental aspect of the knowledge of reality, but which nevertheless does not exhaust it. The *verum* was in fact defined, in Western philosophy up to the threshold of modernity, as one of the *transcendentals*⁶, i.e. those properties of being such as unity and goodness, which coincide with what is common to all beings. From a gnosēological point of view, transcendentals would be the first concepts of thought, since they cannot be logically traced back to something that precedes them, and are therefore *co-extensive* with being, with all that is. Now, if this is true, then whatever their language, civilisation, or personal history, all seek the truth of being, of reality, all men as men; consequently, what truth (goodness, beauty) is, the Chinese too can always and everywhere ask themselves, and, like them, so can every human being:

Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life? These are the questions which we find in the sacred writings of Israel, as also in the Veda and the Avesta; we find them in the writings of Confucius and Lao-Tze, and in the

An Outdated Sapiential Theology for Understanding the Present: the Case of China

Pierre Galassi

preaching of Tirthankara and Buddha; they appear in the poetry of Homer and in the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles, as they do in the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle. They are questions which have their common source in the quest for meaning which has always compelled the human heart. In fact, the answer given to these questions decides the direction which people seek to give to their lives.⁷

Admittedly, for Chinese thought, a logic as stringent and ironclad as the Greek, Aristotelian one, perhaps never existed. And it is also true that Chinese wisdom tends more towards practice than theory. But the crux of the matter is precisely this: is truth only about theory? *Quid est veritas?*⁸ For centuries in the West, the common sense that the intellect was made to know reality and that truth was the impact of being on our knowledge dominated certainty: «Truth is the squaring of thought and thing».⁹

With the dawn of modernity, we have witnessed not only a progressive reduction of truth to thought, but also the progressive evasion of the question of whether there is a *truth of existence*, which any medieval would have answered in the affirmative, and that is the *bonum*. St. Thomas, while not confusing the different planes of this quest, was able to harmonise them as perhaps no one else before, saying that truth is the good of the intellect, but at the same time practical intelligence has as its own good, that is, truth oriented towards a righteous desire.¹⁰ Now, Chinese thought has gone precisely in the direction of this question, this search for a good and upright life, although it has always tended more towards desire than reflection:

If the warp of Heaven is disordered and the innate character of things violated, Arcane Heaven is denied its potential. Beasts that live together will scatter, and birds will all sing at night. Disaster will extend to plants and trees, and calamity will befall insects. Ah! Such is the calamity caused by the control of people!¹¹

It is well known that, among the Chinese, there has always been more interest in the identification of *correspondences* (synchronies, harmonies)

than the exquisitely Western focus on *causality*.¹² This mechanism is more understandable if one considers that in Chinese thought there is a certain modesty regarding the human possibilities of theoretical understanding of reality in its totality, even the reality of oneself: «“There is no one that knows me” Tsze kung said, “What do you mean by thus saying that no one knows you?” He replied, “I do not murmur against Heaven. I do not grumble against men, my studies lie low, and my penetration rises high. But there is Heaven; - that knows me!”».¹³ Corresponding to this, however, is a strong belief in *practical wisdom*, a wisdom that does not reduce but complements discursive resources to describe reality. This is the truth behind the common view that Chinese philosophy is relatively concrete, practical and uninterested in truth. We are dealing with a thought that prefers persuasion and suggestion to argumentation.

On closer inspection, in the Chinese tradition one rarely finds an appreciation for the discovery of the *way* things really are that is separate from how this discovery fits into a *desirable, good* way of life. This is why a key term to render the idea of truth in China has always been 道 *Dào*, a polysemantic term that can be translated as *way, path, method, discourse*.¹⁴ Practical reason, it is true, concerns the singular, but it is also true that what is directed to the practical is not necessarily disconnected from the universal: when we read reflections like «the superior man bends his attention to what is radical. That being established, all practical courses naturally grow up. Filial piety and fraternal submission! - are they not the root of all benevolent actions?».¹⁵ Now, we see here that there is no indication that this is limited to Chinese culture; rather, Confucius here means to say something about man, something universal. The quintessential classic of the Daoist universe, at the same time, leaves open very radical questions, to the point that some contemporary sinologists have spoken of the *apophaticism* of the 道 *Dào*:

The Dao is (like) the emptiness of a vessel; and in our employment of it we must be on our guard against all fullness. How deep and unfathomable it is, as if it were the Honoured Ancestor of all things! We should

The Dao is (like) the emptiness of a vessel; and in our employment of it we must be on our guard against all fullness. How deep and unfathomable it is, as if it were the Honoured Ancestor of all things! We should blunt our sharp points, and unravel the complications of things; we should attemper our brightness, and bring ourselves into agreement with the obscurity of others. How pure and still the Dao is, as if it would ever so continue! I do not know whose son it is. It might appear to have been before God.¹⁷

Thinking back to what has been said so far, the temptation to see an anti-metaphysical interest in the Chinese tradition is perhaps a *self-fulfilling prophecy*, an ill-concealed desire to see Chinese thinkers as representatives of the path taken by western philosophy too late; after all, Voltaire himself thought he could easily get rid of the Christian God by calling into question the experience of the Jesuit missionaries in China.¹⁸ Admittedly, quantitatively speaking, the modern evangelisation of China fell terribly short of expectations, but one wonders whether the truth of an action, and especially of a missionary action, is a matter of numbers, consensus and visibility, and not rather of *substance*.

Father Matteo Ricci SJ (Li Mǎdòu 利瑪竇, 1552–1610),¹⁹ in the wake of the Fathers of the Church, critical of the limitations of paganism but in respectful dialogue with the wisdom of the philosophers, used a method that has always been practised in the Church, with a conformation that has become famous as *accommodation*,²⁰ and which, thanks to the recent theorisation by my mentor, Father Antonio Olmi, can rightly be called sapiential realism:

Adopting this approach, in thought and in life, means accepting all the original certainties and the first principles of implicit philosophy (the most important of which is the ‘primacy of reality’), and being willing to know reality itself not simply with the help of ‘natural’ reason (concrete but limited), or ‘scientific’ reason (rigorous but also limited), or ‘philosophical’ reason (rigorous but abstract), but by means of ‘sapiential’ reason. Aimed only at the search for the truth that is good and the good that is true, this

mode of reason is more analogue than analytical, synthetic or dialectical; it signals instead of demonstrating; it 'tastes' the truth instead of 'seeing it'; and in order to express this ineffable sentiment, uses thought to force words to go beyond thought and words directly to the heart of the created reality and the mystery of the Creator.²¹

2. Realistic Sapiential Christocentrism as a Theological Choice for China

I want to consider seriously the possibility that Ricci's work was only an episode, an albeit excellent application of that broader sapiential realism that Olmi theorised on several occasions. And so it is that, extending Olmi's syntagma and analysing it in a more extensive and exhaustive treatment, I have reformulated it in terms of a new paradigm for theology: *realistic sapiential Christocentrism*.²² Underlying this paradigm is a certainty: affirming the incarnation of Λόγος implies not only the ascertaining a fact but also the establishing a method. Christian theology always takes its cue, first and foremost, from Revelation, which finds its culmination in the Event-Christ, and both the typological scriptural reading and the theology of the *semina Verbi* present a

radical Christocentrism: Christ presents Himself as the Fulfilment and hermeneutical Key to the Revelation attested in Scripture, establishing a new relationship between God, the world and man and inscribing the whole in that *Communio speculum* that is the Church. The Fathers themselves extended and made rigorous this foundation by applying it to everything that is explicitly located *extra Ecclesiam*, achieving various nuances in reading the presence of the Word elsewhere than in the Church.

The formulation of sapiential realism in St. Thomas Aquinas has reached a point of no return - currently unsurpassed - in providing theology with the most adequate and extensive tools for a correct and non-partial presentation of the revealed datum. Not only that, the Magisterium has not ceased to propose Aquinas as the undisputed and unrivalled *auctoritas* in theological reflection:

Thomas had the great merit of giving pride of place to the harmony which exists between faith and reason. [...] Although he made much of the supernatural character of faith, the Angelic Doctor did not overlook the importance of its reasonableness; indeed he was able to plumb the depths and explain the

meaning of this reasonableness. [...] This is why the Church has been justified in consistently proposing Saint Thomas as a master of thought and a model of the right way to do theology. [...] Saint Thomas was impartial in his love of truth. He sought truth wherever it might be found and gave a consummate demonstration of its universality. In him, the Church's Magisterium has seen and recognized the passion for truth [...]. Looking unreservedly to truth, the realism of Thomas could recognize the objectivity of truth and produce not merely a philosophy of "what seems to be" but a philosophy of "what is".²³

Of this sapiential realism, *ante litteram* in Scripture and the Fathers, *theorice* in St Thomas, there have been other manifestations in the history of theology, whether conscious or not. One concrete historical application was within the evangelisation of China by the Society of Jesus between the 16th and 18th centuries. From the spiritual and sapiential horizon inaugurated by St Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*,²⁴ and condensed pedagogically in the *Ratio studiorum* of Society of Jesus, up to Ricci's *Catechism*²⁵ and to lesser-known but no less relevant works.²⁶

After a certain positivistic univocism



that had prevailed until the beginning of the 20th century, contemporary thought has rediscovered and re-admitted that the text as such, and every text, is a *textus* - a fabric - comprising author, context and reader. This applies a fortiori with sacred Scripture, which *crescit cum legentibus*. Not only that. Without certainly disqualifying the literal aspect and the strong density of the philological contribution - sinological, in the case in question, - the theological horizon moves, however, on another level, no less normative. In this sense we want to make our own the Gadamerian hermeneutic idea of *applicatio* as equidistance between *intentio auctoris* and *receptio lectoris*, since it is «neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but co-determines it as a whole from the beginning».²⁷ The essential point is then to carry out this application not in a mere comparison of knowledge, nor in a human and arbitrary invasion of the field, but in the light of the logic of the Incarnation that the Mystery of Christ discloses. This hermeneutic process that Christianity opens up in relation to culture, any culture, as the religion of Λόγος made flesh, is what lies behind Chesterton's provocative yet suggestive words about the opening of an infinite horizon that conversion to Christianity, the Key to the whole of reality, generates:

I attempt no apologetic about why the creed should be accepted. But in answer to the historical query of why it was accepted and is accepted, I answer for millions of others in my reply; because it fits the lock, because it is like life. It is one among many stories; only it happens to be a true story. It is one among many philosophies; only it happens to be the truth. We accept it; and the ground is solid under our feet and the road is open before us. It does not imprison us in a dream of destiny or a consciousness of the universal delusion. It opens to us not only incredible heavens but what seems to some an equally incredible earth, and makes it credible. This is the sort of truth that is hard to explain because it is a fact; but it is a fact to which we can call witnesses. We are Christians and Catholics not because we worship a key, but because we have passed a door; and

felt the wind that is the trumpet of liberty bow over the land of the living.²⁸

A door to open, China, the Key to it, Christ. All that remains is to find the lock in which to insert it. Well then, what is the intersection that Christ, Truth incarnate, opens up as he encounters the universe China? It seemed to us, with a simplification perhaps worthy of the great narratives of the history of early 20th century ideas, but probably not without foundation, to be identified in the category of *Wisdom*. Wisdom is a very special analogical lens on reality, since it manages to hold together, without dissolving them, the structural poles of which reality, Creation and the relationship between God and creature are composed. Let us therefore try to reread everything said according to an *analogia sapientiae*.²⁹

Wisdom is presented as a *good* knowledge of reality; on the human level it is the integration of truth and good, intellect and will, in terms of a *savouring* (latin *sāpĕre*) of reality. It is precisely for this reason that the term cannot be defined in an unambiguous sense, while at the same time maintaining a subtle, ordered connection between planes, thus avoiding equivocation; for this reason we intend to propose it as a neuralgic analogical category for theological reflection as well. The *sapientia* brings together under a single analogical category the ethical world (φρόνησις), the world of knowledge (σοφία), and even the world of biblical wisdom (חִכְמָה *hokmah*) and the hypostasis of God himself (Σοφία), all without fragmenting but also without confusing the planes:

Understood in this extended sense, the figure of the wise man is certainly one of the highest examples of human achievement: he is the one who knows and who knows how to act, who sees more clearly than others the relationship between truth and good. An 'evil sage' is a contradiction in terms: it is rather the antithesis of the sage, the 'foolish and insipid' (Deut 32:6) in the biblical sense, 'who has eyes but does not see, who has ears but does not hear' (Jer 5:15). the authentic sage, on the other hand, is identified by three essential characteristics: obedience to reality, the search for truth, the desire for good.³⁰

With regard to the consideration of the religious fact, the notion of wisdom is strategic because it allows us to circumvent, at least from a theoretical perspective, the split between knowledge and experience that very often plagues the usual classifications. Wisdom, in its classical meaning of σοφία (*scire per causas*) and φρόνησις (practical wisdom, *prudentia*), allows neither the intellectual nor the moral aspect to be disconnected from religious experience. An emblematic case of this discourse is precisely Chinese thought, which highlights a dimension of the human and the religious that is irreducible to classical categorisations. The Dominican C. Geffré stated:

Il y a en effet des religions avec une emphase prophétique, éthique, historique. Dieu se rend présent au monde des hommes par une parole, un commandement, une loi. C'est le cas des religions monothéistes. Nous sommes alors dans une logique existentielle. il y a des religions avec une emphase mystique, métaphysique, esthétique. C'est le cas des religions de l'Extrême-Orient. Nous sommes alors plutôt dans une logique de correspondance que l'on peut appeler aussi une logique symbolique. Si l'on envisage les rapports de Dieu et du divin avec le monde, nous sommes dans l'ordre de la «participation». Il y a une manifestation non verbale du sacré et l'homme se définit surtout par son appartenance à un temps originaire et à un cosmos sacré. En fait, c'est une des caractéristiques du christianisme de combiner ces deux logiques et de comporter une tension entre le pôle «parole» et le pôle «sacrement».³¹

A fundamental concept in Chinese thought, also political, is the *Mandate of Heaven* (Tianming 天命 *tiānmìng*),³² conceived as both a moral law and a cosmic law. There is only one order that is at once cosmic, social and ethical. By virtue of the Chinese *Weltanschauung*, Heaven and man are not separated, to the extent that any perturbation of society has its counterpart in a perturbation of physical nature; at the same time, there is a close link between family, society and Empire (State) at the service of the most authentic realisation of man, to the extent that Chinese thought has been called *universism*.³³

Chinese thought proposes an authentic sapiential reading of man (in harmony with the Cosmos), of which the virtue of *humanity* (仁 *rén*) is perhaps the summary figure.³⁴ The Chinese particularity lies precisely in this sapiential mentality that is not confused purely and simply with ethics (understood in an exclusively practical sense) and at the same time does not exclude another dimension, as we have seen with regard to Confucian theism: «On serait tenté de dire que le sapientiel est au-delà de la distinction du sacré et du profane. Il est de l'ordre de l'existentiel, si par «existentiel» on convient d'entendre l'humain véritable»;³⁵ in the Chinese case, we would then have a kind of *humanist religion*, or a *philosophy of holiness*.³⁶ This virtue, however, is not merely anthropological or humanistic in the atheistic sense. Human wisdom is participation in the Wisdom of Heaven that is inscribed in the human heart. Certainly there is a universe of intricate differences that casts doubt on any easy appropriation, yet we want to «seulement manifester des non-incompatibilités et je tente de discerner dans le sapientiel chinois comme une mystérieuse pierre d'attente par rapport à la singularité du religieux chrétien».³⁷

Interestingly, it is precisely through the Wisdom Writings that the Old Testament narrative acquired its universality and ensured a possible encounter between Israel and the Nations.³⁸ At the same time, the books of Wisdom, Proverbs³⁹ and many Psalms refer to Wisdom as a divine attribute, and St Paul states that «to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God [θεοῦ σοφίαν]».⁴⁰

3. Religion and Revelation: What Connection?

The inestimable and wise dynamism that Christianity achieves in relation to religion, including both the problem of the cosmos and that of existence, conceives precisely the relationship between God and the creature as an *analogical* relationship. This implies first of all that God is not the absolutization of any creature, neither the spiritual nor the universal, neither will nor thought, neither the personal nor the ideal: he is not the *coincidentia opposi-*

torum. He is beyond everything, beyond all comprehensible content, and it is precisely this *in-comprehensibility* that allows the intellect and will to be open to such *Deus absconditus*.

On the other hand, however, this totality of Creation, in its contrasts and ever new tensions, is God's (natural) revelation from above; this is to be understood not in a pantheistic sense, since this revelation is not necessary, limiting or additional to God himself, but rather as the unveiling of the mysterious Meaning to which the totality of creatures in the fabric of their unity of tensions and polarities points, in a different way. In this sense, the creaturely is the analogy of God, it is the *vestigium Trinitatis* that unveils and reveals the God in and above Himself: «Console-toi, tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne m'avais trouvé».⁴¹ Herein lies the decisive reason from which Christian theology proceeds with regard to the problem of nature and the problem of the existence of religion: in the analogy it unites all that is creaturely in an overall likeness to God, which in its ultimate essence is constant *potentia oboedientialis* towards Him. The analogy disavows any dualism between immanence and transcendence, preserving the distinction of both:

He made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions, so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'.⁴²

The analogy is like a thin line of demarcation that qualifies Christian Religion versus religions, separating the true experience of God from any creaturely reductionism in either direction.

Throughout the breadth of Catholic theology, from protology to Incarnation to Ἐσχάτος, one fundamental point holds true: Creation is directed to God, not the other way around. This unitary, one-way design also reveals the indissolubility of man, of the creature, as an ordered (analogical) unity in itself, in its constitution. Translated into religious discourse, intellect and will, knowledge and love are not conceivable as separate

horizons of attainment of the divine. Moreover, if we wish, intellect and will are themselves analogical to the dynamism of immanence and transcendence respectively:

Now there is this difference between the appetite and the intellect, or any knowledge whatsoever, that knowledge is according as the thing known is in the knower, whilst appetite is according as the desirer tends towards the thing desired. Thus the term of the appetite, namely good, is in the object desirable, and the term of the intellect, namely true, is in the intellect itself.⁴³

Insofar as the cognitive and volitional tensions are different from each other, religious experience and its metaphysical understanding are naturally distinct from each other. Since they are, however, both intentional forms of the same analogy, the factual interaction can be experienced in both directions: religious experience, in its direction of reverence for God as a real, true and good Object, undergoes reflection, and theoretical apprehension, for its part, in its ultimate avoidance of confrontation with the incomprehensible, is animated by the motion of religious reverence out of love.

It is precisely for this reason that it is impossible to find a religious thought or attitude that wants to call itself absolutely Catholic and be at the same time *absolute* intellectual or volitional; just as there is neither absolute immanence nor absolute transcendence in the Catholic vision, neither is there absolute mysticism nor absolute worship, as demonstrated by the greatness of the liturgy itself. It is therefore not authentic mysticism that does not inwardly bear the form of worship; at the same time, Catholic worship is, by its very nature, permeated by the mysticism of loving closeness to God.

However strict the difference between the natural religious endowment and the creature's supernatural elevation remains, and however much the possibility of an internal connection (*ex parte hominis*) between the two (as if there were a supernatural claim on the part of the creature) is not given, both nevertheless find unity in the wisdom of the analogy. Thanks to it, the creature can ultimately only be understood as a

movement from God in which nature and the supernatural are one and the same and, consequently, its religious origin is read as a return to God whose very nature and supernature indicate the unity of the act.

From this perspective, the *minimum* of (implicit) faith through which every man, in his given circumstances and according to his strength, can give himself in sincere surrender to God can be at the same time the *minimum* of (explicit) faith in which man is accepted by God, i.e. the germinal form of supernatural faith in love (*fides caritate formata*);⁴⁴ this is possible if one does not exclude the specifically creaturely qualification of religion, even if its Purpose and Object exceeds any natural desirability. Translated into contemporary terms, God's universal salvific will implies that He gives non-Christians sufficient help to be saved. Those who sincerely seek God and, with His grace, follow the dictates of conscience are on the path to salvation:

Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life. But often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasonings and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator. Or some there are who, living and dying in this world without God, are

exposed to final despair. Wherefore to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all of these, and mindful of the command of the Lord, "Preach the Gospel to every creature", the Church fosters the missions with care and attention.⁴⁵

Mysteriously God makes it possible for every man to be associated with the Paschal Mystery.⁴⁶ He, in ways known only to Him,⁴⁷ can lead even the blameless ignorant of the Gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please Him, although the Magisterium does not indicate whether it is necessary for Salvation to come to the explicit Christian faith before death; at the same time, the question of whether non-Christian religions contain elements of Revelation and can serve as *means* of Salvation is still left to theology:

Theology today, in its reflection on the existence of other religious experiences and on their meaning in God's salvific plan, is invited to explore if and in what way the



historical figures and positive elements of these religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation. In this undertaking, theological research has a vast field of work under the guidance of the Church's Magisterium. The Second Vatican Council, in fact, has stated that: "the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a participation in this one source". The content of this participated mediation should be explored more deeply, but must remain always consistent with the principle of Christ's unique mediation [...]. Hence, those solutions that propose a salvific action of God beyond the unique mediation of Christ would be contrary to Christian and Catholic faith.⁴⁹

Christian missionary activity serves to rectify, ennoble and perfect the seeds of truth and goodness that God has sown among non-Christian peoples, for the glory of God and the spiritual benefit of the evangelised. It is therefore indispensable to distinguish, in non-Christians, that an act of adherence that may consist of supernatural (explicit) *theological faith* that embraces revealed Truth, and an act of human *belief* that may contemplate error, may coexist. They can coexist precisely because they are not on the same plane. And it is precisely to this clarification that the mission of evangelisation is ordered, which encounters one and the other, the seeds of the Word and human error.⁵⁰ Although God can never cease to be God and the creature can never cease to be the creature, any mutual relational motion always and necessarily remains within the limits of the ultimate tension of unity in the distinction between the two parts.

Theology as wisdom *leads to* God from the creature, but precisely *comprehends* the creature from God. This also explains Christianity's claim to exclusivity: since the direction of the content of religion is fundamentally determined by the relationship between God and the creature, only Christianity can be the one and only true religion that in this relationship does not dissolve God in the creature nor the creature in God. Sacred Scripture ensures that God has never left Himself without witness for any human reality: «In past generations

he allowed all Gentiles to go their own ways; yet, in bestowing his goodness, he did not leave himself without witness».⁵¹ His testimonies are signs of His saving manifestations to all. Not only that; the inner testimony of every human conscience bears witness to God as Creator and Lawgiver.

The universal proofs of the divine, under the guidance of Grace, can give rise to a rudimentary (implicit) faith that stretches forward in hope and expectation of further manifestations of God's merciful love and guidance for existence. By accepting the signs already given and placing their hope in God's redeeming love in Christ, those who have not heard the Gospel *κήρυγμα* can still find themselves on the road to Salvation. If they are faithful to the Grace given to them, they may have good hope of receiving that same Bliss for which they yearn. Nevertheless, the search is no substitute for discovery and adherence. To be blessed and saved in this life, one must encounter and adhere to that

gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now manifested through the prophetic writings and, according to the command of the eternal God, made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith.⁵²

4. Conclusion: Where are the Boundaries of the Church?

By entering through Baptism into the Mystery of the Cross and Resurrection, Christians undergo a radical transformation that sets them unequivocally *on* the road to Salvation. Only after conversion to the explicit faith can one enter the Community that is nourished by the Word of God and the Sacraments, which enable the faithful to grow in ever greater union with Christ. This fullness of means only occurs in the Church of Christ.

The Christian religion, in this view, is never the *absolutization* of any human religious aspect, of any religious sense or context; it stands on another level; this is precisely why we intend to present the different non-Christian religions not as *ways*, but at most as the *ground*, the (human, natural) *interpretative covering* of the Incarnate Word in history. Insofar as they are human, they

can have the traits of a *premise* for the attainment of perfection, which is only realised in Christ and His Church. A prejudice to be debunked: this does not devalue non-Christian religious experiences, but on the contrary elevates them to the highest point of realisation of the human as a tendency (*relationship*) to God. In fact, to the extent that the supernatural relationship with God includes the natural relationship, its forms (cultural, historical, geographical) also continue to exist, only purified and thus perfected: as the creature is elevated closer to God and God is lowered closer to her, her creatureliness is not abolished but consecrated. To place religious culture within the horizon of Creation is to place it in the highest perspective of *openness* and dignity to Revelation.

The analogical-sapiential structure of the reality revealed by the Mystery of the Incarnate Word is then perfectly reflected in the Church itself, understood as the Body of Christ: the fact that Christianity (including visible and hierarchical catholicity, of course) is the perfect synthesis of unity-distinction-order between the religion of transcendence and the immanence of God in History, between individual religion and community religion, between interior religion and cultic religion, between natural religion (in the sense of the inclusion of the material world) and cultural religion, all in the Light of the Mystery of Christ, constitutes the first and main sign of its divine origin.

The wisdom of the Christian faith is so all-pervasive, and *a fortiori* in virtue of the Incarnation, that it has no limits of extension: for this reason there is no sphere of culture into which the Christian faith has not entered, or cannot enter, in its own right. This is the ultimate principle of Christian inculturation (or interculturality), a synthetic figure of which sapiential dialogue is the primary task for contemporary proclamation. It is neither a question of an *instrumental* dialogue, whose specific character consists in manipulating the interlocutor in order to lead him to share one's own position; nor of a *contextual* dialogue, a polite discussion distinguished by the search for consensus, perhaps superficial and ephemeral, among the participants; nor of a *sectorial* dialogue, carried out between specialists who restrict the debate to a single topic

of common interest; the proposal is that of a *sapiential* dialogue, which has in view the highest good, which derives from the sharing of truth, which is made possible by the obedient adaptation of the interlocutors to reality.⁵³

This, however, reveals a fundamental and scandalously paradoxical aspect of Christianity: the singular *veiling* of the supernatural in the natural, which passes from the figure of Christ to the figure of His Mystical Body, the Church. The inconceivable closeness of God, manifested in it, seems in the end to exist almost only to cover that immeasurable distance of God between the unfathomable Mystery of the Trinity and the creature. The deepest closeness of God to man and of man to God is manifested in Christian interiority, in Christian worship and even in Christian praxis and mysticism, but remembering the underlying *paradox*: «The whole secret of mysticism is this: that man can understand everything by the help of what he does not understand».⁵⁴ Christianity, with its analogical heart, is the only Reality that redeems reality from being, which to human eyes seems at most an explosive unity of contradictions, showing it to the Light of the Word as an ordered unity of tensions, which finds in Him, in Him alone, σοφία of the Cosmos and History, its own Origin, its own clarifying Distinction and its own ultimate End. All this speaks of a path, a way (Via). It might be a further working hypothesis to verify whether the multi-form Way that is the 道 Dào, the beating heart of Chinese thought as Direction, Relation, Meaning, might not in the future definitively and fruitfully encounter the Christian λόγος, which is precisely «the way and the truth and the life».⁵⁵ But perhaps there is an even more radical hypothesis, one that we know to be true (*ex parte Dei*) even if not yet reflected (*ex parte hominis*): this encounter is possible because it has in fact already taken place: «Have I lost anything by being a Catholic? Absolutely nothing. On the contrary, I have gained Christ, and in gaining Christ I have gained all».⁵⁶

NOTES

1. A.J. Toynbee, *The World and the West*, Oxford University Press, London 1953, pp. 64-65.
2. Press Office of the Holy See, *Communiqué concerning the signing of a Provisional Agreement between the*

- Holy See and the People's Republic of China on the appointment of Bishops*, September the 22nd 2018.
3. M. Granet, *La pensée chinoise*, Éditions Albin Michel, Paris 1968, *Introduction*.
4. M. Granet, *La pensée chinoise*, p. 476.
5. Among the various essays see the famous H. Fingarette, Confucius. *The secular as sacred*, Harper & Row, New York 1972, and the more recent J.R. Brown – A. McLeod, *Transcendence and non-naturalism in early Chinese thought*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2021.
6. From the Latin *transcendentalia*, *transcendere*, 'to overcome', the term is sometimes made to correspond to the Latin universal, which is in fact not superimposable, although this is not the context for reflection on this issue. For a historical and philosophical framing of the issue cf. A. de Libera, *La querelle des universaux. De Platon à la fin du Moyen Age*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2014.
7. John Paul II (s.), *Encyclical Letter Fides et Ratio*, n. 1.
8. Cf. *Jn* 18:38.
9. Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus», Thomas Aquinas (s.), *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 16, a. 1, resp., *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, rev. by Daniel J. Sullivan, 2 vols (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1952), I, p. 95.
10. «Bene et male mentis, idest intellectus vel rationis, quae est speculativa, et non practica, consistit simpliciter in vero et falso; ita scilicet quod verum absolutum est bonum eius, et falsum absolutum est malum ipsius. Dicere enim verum et falsum est opus pertinens ad quemlibet intellectum. Sed bonum practici intellectus non est veritas absoluta, sed veritas confesse se habens, idest concorditer ad appetitum rectum, sicut ostensum est, quod sic virtutes morales concordant», Thomas Aquinas (s.), *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, I, VI, c. 2.
11. «亂天之經，逆物之情，玄天弗成；解獸之群，而鳥皆夜鳴；災及草木，禍及止蟲。意！治人之過也！», Zhuangzi (莊子) – R.J. Lynn (ed.), *Zhuangzi, A New Translation of the Sayings of Master Zhuang as Interpreted by Guo Xiang*, c. XI, pp. 218-219. All Chinese texts in this article were taken from the *Chinese Text Project* database (<https://ctext.org/>).
12. Famous is the principle of synchronicity theorised by Carl Gustav Jung from his reflection on Chinese thought, especially from the enigmatic *Classic of Change*, *Yijing* 易經, cf. C.G. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (USA) 1960.
13. «子曰：「莫我知也夫！」子貢曰：「何為其莫知子也？」子曰：「不怨天，不尤人。下學而上達。知我者，其天乎！」», Confucius, *Analects* [論語 Lúnyǔ], I. XIV 憲問 *Xian Wen*, n. 35, chinese text with english translation in J. Legge (ed.), *The Chinese classics*, 7 voll., Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1893-95, I, pp. 152-153.
14. The term 道dào literally can mean way, road, path, course, discourse or even method; it is the fundamental concept of Chinese philosophy, and has exerted considerable influence on subsequent intellectual developments in China. It can function as a noun or a verb, sometimes indicating the road on which one travels, the act of travelling a road, or even the act of making a road by driving someone or building a road. It can also refer to speech, especially within philosophical or moral reflection.; cf. the voice 道dào in *Le Grand Dictionnaire Ricci de la langue chinoise*, Instituts Ricci, Paris – Taipei 2001, 7 voll.
15. «君子務本，本立而道生。孝弟也者，其為仁之本與！», Confucius, *Analects* [論語 Lúnyǔ], I. I 學而 Xue Er, n. 2, in J. Legge (ed.), *The Chinese classics*, I, pp. 2-3.
16. Cf. Laozi (老子) – A. Andreini (ed.), *Daodejing. Il canone della via e della virtù. Testo cinese a fronte*, Einaudi, Bologna 2018, *Introduction*; M. Csikszentmihalyi, «Mysticism and apophatic discourse in the Laozi», in M. Csikszentmihalyi – P.J. Ivanhoe (edd.), *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi*, SUNY, New York 1999, pp. 33-58.
17. «道沖而用之或不盈。淵兮似萬物之宗。挫其銳，解其紛，和其光，同其塵。湛兮似或存。吾不知誰之子，象帝之先», Laozi (老子) – R. Ames – D. Hall (edd.), *Dao De Jing [Dàodéjīng] 道德經*. *A Philosophical Translation*, Random House Publishing Group, New York 2010, c. 4, p. 83.
18. Cf. Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, par G. Stenger, GF-Flammarion, Paris 2010, especially the voice *Puissance*.
19. Cf. R. Po-Chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610)*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010.
20. Cf. D.E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology*, The University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu 1989; Kim Sangkeun, *Strange Names of God. The Missionary Translation of the Divine Name and the Chinese Responses to Matteo Ricci's "Shangti" in Late Ming China, 1583-1644*, Studies in biblical literature, Peter Lang, New York 2004.
21. A. Olmi, «IV. Il "Paradigma di Calcedonia" e il realismo Sapienziale di San Tommaso d'Aquino e di P. Matteo Ricci», in Id., *P. Matteo Ricci e san*

- Tommaso d'Aquino. *Sette studi sul tomismo sapienziale* [Sacra Doctrina 65(2020)2], pp. 147-148.
22. Our doctoral dissertation, published in full, was dedicated to this paradigm: P. Galassi, *Il cristocentrismo realistico sapienziale. Contributo alla teologia delle religioni*, Collana Teologia n. 79, ESD – Edizioni Studio Domenicano, Bologna 2024; cf. also our article P. Galassi, «5. Theological Themes in the First Treatise», in T. Meynard - D. Canaris (edd.), *From Confucius to Zhu Xi. The First Treatise on God in François Noël's Chinese Philosophy* (1711), Global Perspectives on Medieval and Early Modern Historiography, vol. 1, Brepols, Turnhout 2023, pp. 129-154.
 23. John Paul II (s.), *Encyclical Letter Fides et Ratio*, nn. 43-44.
 24. «Según la disposición de las personas que quieren tomar ejercicios espirituales, es a saber, según que tienen edad, letras o ingenio, se han de aplicar los tales ejercicios / iuxta eius, qui exercetur, habitudinem, puta pro aetate, doctrina vel ingenio, accommodari debent exercitia», Ignazio di Loyola (s.), *Monumenta Ignatiana. Series secunda, Exercitia spiritualia. Textus archetypi*, n. 18, 2 voll., by J. Calveras – C. De Dalmases, Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, Roma 1955-1969, I, p. 156.
 25. M. Ricci, The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven [《天主實義》], by D. Lancashire - P. Hu Kuo-Chen - T. Meynard, Institute of Jesuit Sources, Boston 2016.
 26. Among others, the major work of the Flemish Jesuit François Noël (1651-1729), to whom the central part of our PhD is dedicated; cf. F. Noël, *Philosophia Sinica tribus tractatibus, Primo Cognitionem Primi Entis, Secundo Ceremonias erga Defunctos, Tertio Ethicam, Juxta Sinarum mentem complectens, Typis Universitatis Carolo-Ferdinandaeae*, Praga 1711.
 27. H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, by J. Weinsheimer - D.G. Marshall, Crossroad, New York 1989.
 28. G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, by K. Belmonte, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1993, pp. 248-249.
 29. Cf. T.J. White, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity. A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology*, Sapientia Press, Ave Maria (USA) 2009, especially the c. 8, pp. 251-290.
 30. A. Olmi, «Introduzione», in Id., *P. Matteo Ricci e san Tommaso d'Aquino. Sette studi sul tomismo sapienziale*, 15-16.
 31. C. Geffré, *Le christianisme comme religion de l'Evangile*, Les éditions du Cerf, Paris 2012, pp. 275-276.
 32. Cf. S. Allan, «On the Identity of Shang Di上帝 and the Origin of the Concept of a Celestial Mandate (TIAN MING天命)», *Early China* 31(2007), pp. 1-46.
 33. Cf. J.J.M. De Groot, *Universismus. Die Grundlage der Religion und Ethik, des Staatswesens und der Wissenschaften Chinas*, G. Reimer, Berlin 1918.
 34. Cf. Yao Xinzong, *Confucianism and Christianity. A Comparative Study of Jen [仁 rén] and Agape*, Sussex Academic Press, Eastbourne 1996.
 35. C. Geffré, *Le christianisme comme religion de l'Evangile*, 277.
 36. Cf. L. Vandermeersch, *Le fait religieux*, Fayard, Paris 1993.
 37. C. Geffré, *Le christianisme comme religion de l'Evangile*, 281. Note the allusion to the *pierres d'attente* mentioned by International Theological Commission, *Christianity and Religions* (1997), n. 4, regarding Jean Daniélou's tendency.
 38. Cf. P. Beauchamp, *Le récit, la lettre et le corps*, Cogitatio Fidei, Cerf, Paris 1992.
 39. Cf. especially Prv 1-9.
 40. 1 Cor 1:24.
 41. B. Pascal, *Pensées (le mystère de Jésus)*, Hachette, Paris 1917, p. 575.
 42. Acts 17:26-28.
 43. «Hoc autem distat inter appetitum et intellectum, sive quamcumque cognitionem, quia cognitio est secundum quod cognitum est in cognoscente, appetitus autem est secundum quod appetens inclinatur in ipsam rem appetitam. Et sic terminus appetitus, quod est bonum, est in re appetibili, sed terminus cognitionis, quod est verum, est in ipso intellectu», Thomas Aquinas (s.), *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 16, a. 1, resp., *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, I, p. 95.
 44. Cf. M. Rose, *Fides caritate formata. Das Verhältnis von Glaube und Liebe in der Summa theologiae des Thomas von Aquin*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen – 2007.
 45. Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*, n. 16.
 46. Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22.
 47. Cf. Heb 11:6; Second Vatican Council, *Decree Ad Gentes on the mission activity of the Church*, n. 7.
 48. Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*, 62.
 49. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration Dominus Iesus* (2000), n. 14, an issue also reiterated in an ecclesiological sense in n. 21.
 50. Paths of research in this direction can be, for example, the questioning of the lines of tangency between the salvation of non-Christians and children who die without Baptism, for whom a *funeral Mass for Unbaptized Children Who Die* was inserted after the post-conciliar liturgical reform, which simultaneously includes elements of caution and hope; or, for more strictly theological elaborations, one line is that of the so-called elements of *ecclesiality of non-Christian religions*, inaugurated by Jacques Maritain, cf. F. Daguet, «Présence du Christ aux non-chrétiens: J. Maritain, héritier de Thomas d'Aquin et de Charles de Foucauld», in S.-T. Bonino (ed.), *Actes du Colloque organisé par l'Institut Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin (Toulouse, 13-14 mai 2005)*, sous la direction de S.-Th. Bonino, o.p., *Revue Thomiste* 106(2006)1-2.
 51. Acts 14:16-17.
 52. Rom 16:25-26.
 53. A. Olmi, «Introduzione», in Id., *P. Matteo Ricci e san Tommaso d'Aquino. Sette studi sul tomismo sapienziale*, 32.
 54. G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, Kassock Bros. Publishing Co., Lexington (USA) 2012, p. 23.
 55. Jn 14:6.
 56. J.C.H. Wu, *Beyond East and West*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (USA) 2018, *Conclusion*.

The General Chapters and the Development of Preaching Justice

Ivan Attard

Preaching Justice is an integral part of the preaching ministry. A preacher has to proclaim the Good News is not something abstract, alien or detached from one's life. Neither it is simply the preaching of a set of notions and doctrines or an ethical system. The Good News is the proclamation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who saves and sanctifies. He, who is God, out of his love towards us, chose to become man, to partake in our human life, so that we, by

sanctified and to become an instrument of sanctification, as a member of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, to continue Christ's mission in today's world, here and now.

Attention to justice and peace is not only the duty of the Dominican Order, but of every Christian and any preacher. The Dominican Order through its spirituality, tradition and General Chapters offers to its members and to the whole

considered justice, the denunciation of personal and social sin, the call to repentance and conversion and the reconciliation with God, our Creator, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as inseparable in its preaching and prophetic ministry. The Order in these last General Chapters reaffirmed our duty and priority to preach justice in the world, to enlighten and to sanctify the social, political and economic context of our human existence, the place where we have to live our daily Christian life. The conversion of mind and heart to our Lord Jesus Christ will eventually generate a just social order, which will extinguish the social, political and economic structures of sin. Every form of injustice, oppression, exploitation and violence is a sign of the diffusion of sin in our personal lives, which manifests itself in the way how we organise our social, political and economic life.

Social and cultural background for the General Chapters

After World War II, certain privileged States experienced an economic boom. Other States, especially the newly formed States, due to the process of decolonisation, experienced poverty, injustices, violence, wars and other forms of misery. Moreover, two antagonistic ideologies affirmed themselves and divided the whole world, mainly in two blocs. On one side, we had liberalism, which in the seventies started to deform itself into neoliberalism. On the other side, we had communism, which imploded itself by the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties. During this period, humanity experience the cold war and was continuously threatened by a nuclear war. The fall of communism opened the way to the exponential growth of neoliberalism, with all its cultural, anthropological, ethical, social, political and economic consequences. In these last decades, humanity and the whole of creation were, and still are, in constant threat. The economic and financial machine is devouring

When I was appointed provincial promoter for justice and peace in our Maltese province, I wanted to understand what the Order has been proposing in the last General Chapters as guidelines for our ministry. As I was reading the Acts, I really found them very interesting, inspiring and stimulating. I discovered a treasure very often left aside and forgotten. I thought of gathering in one single book all those texts which regarded matters of justice and peace directly or indirectly, from Quezon City General Chapter (1977) till Biên Hòa (2019). I hope you enjoy reading this book and find it useful and inspiring in your apostolate to give witness to our Lord Jesus Christ, who cares for those who suffer injustices, misery, oppression and social exclusion.

fr Ivan Attard OP
Justice and Peace Provincial Promoter
Maltese Dominican Province – St Pius V



taking part in his life, we receive the grace to participate in his divine life, for our salvation and sanctification. The light of our Lord Jesus Christ has to enlighten our concrete and tangible personal and social experience of life. If we accept the Light, it brings to us salvation from every evil and from all sort of darkness. Therefore, no preacher can ignore what is happening in his or her socio-economic and political context. Every human-being is called to be

Church, a way of living the preaching ministry to the full, to be faithful to Christ, our Saviour and the Church, his Mystical Body.

Preaching justice in the Dominican Order

The Dominican Order didn't start to integrate justice and peace in its preaching simply after the General Chapter of Quezon City 1977. The Order, from the time of its foundation, understood and

everything it finds around it, in order to ensure its growth, where the rich and the powerful become richer and more powerful by impoverishing and weakening the rest of the world's population. Everything and every person became a commodity and an opportunity to exploit for profit and to sacrifice them for the false pantheon of neoliberalism. Surely not every person follows and adheres to this trend. Nevertheless, the economic machine needs it in order to function. Max Weber once said that market-economy follows the rational principle: maximum profit, with the minimum costs. Today's markets brought this principle to an extreme: maximum profit, by all means and at all costs, with the minimum expenses possible. To keep the machine going on, a lot of people and all the environment are being sacrificed to the false god, money and to its economic and financial system, which this idolatry generates, to ensure the interests of the greediest. This economic and financial system, to function properly, needs a particular culture, a certain vision of the world, a specific anthropological and ethical understanding, which serve its purpose: ensuring continuous economic growth, huge profits for the few at the expense of the most. In the years before the Quezon City Chapter, four main documents and events in the Church influenced the development of preaching justice in the world:

- a. the second Vatican Council (1962-1965);
- b. the *Populorum Progressio*, 1968;
- c. the second Latin American Episcopal Conference held in Medellin, Colombia, 1968;
- d. the Synod of Bishops held in 1971, on Justice in the World.

New and old ideologies were inspiring the social, political and economic organisations, which gave rise to various forms of injustices, exploitations, oppression and misery. On the other hand, various social and political movements were reacting and struggling to promote human dignity, human rights, freedom, equality, solidarity and justice. Some of these movements were inspired by the Christian faith, others by ideologies. Other movements were trying to build a bridge and join forces between those who were inspired by faith and those that followed ideologies.

The Church tried to give guidance, support and its contribution to ensure the common good of all people. The Dominican Order did its part also through its General Chapters to support its members and to guide them in preaching justice and peace in the world.

The contribution of the General Chapters

In the following paragraphs, I will try to indicate some aspects, which the General Chapters highlighted and promoted to help us preach justice and peace in the world, our common home.

1. Quezon City 1977

The General Chapter held at Quezon City will be remembered for the formulation of the four priorities, which we have to follow and keep in mind when we organise our apostolate. One of these priorities is preaching justice in the world. Inspired by the Synod of Bishops, 1971, the capitulars invite us to undertake a critical analysis of the origins, forms and structures of injustice in contemporary societies and to implement an evangelical practice for the liberation and integral promotion of man (15, 5). We Dominicans must engage in the field of justice and peace, moved by the evangelical spirit and not by some ideology, even though some ideologies can help us understand the social realities and the structures of injustice. It is the Sanctifying Spirit that must diffuse in the world and not the spirit of the world, which has to be spread in the Mystical Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Quezon City, asks from us: a) to engage ourselves in a self-criticism on the use of goods and the lifestyle that is adopted in our communities (19, 5, a);

b) and to develop a critical and evangelical awareness of political reality to denounce the injustices that oppress a multitude of people who are denied their fundamental rights (19, 6). Theological reflection, starting from the analysis of these structures of sin, must propose means to transform the world into the perspective of the Kingdom of God and make its contribution to promote a just economic system that ensures the common good (19, 7, b-c). The following Chapters developed and applied these guidelines according to

various social circumstances that developed by time.

2. Walberberg 1980

The capitulars gathered in Walberberg emphasised our responsibility of preaching justice. Such ministry requires that the preacher struggles to develop the virtue of humility and be moved by compassion for those who suffer injustices, especially the poor. These virtues have to come from our union with God. In this Chapter, the friars insisted on studying the causes of social evil and to propose a theological reflection on social justice, enlightened by the Gospel and the Church's social teaching, to inspire a new socio-economic order, which ensures the common good, according to God's will.

3. Rome 1983

This Chapter affirms the preferential option for the poor and preaching justice as constitutive of our preaching ministry (70). "Not to opt for the poor is to fall into the danger of making an option for the rich." (234, B, u). The capitulars recall our prophetic mission of denouncing, in the light of the Gospel, the structures of social sin, which are creating many injustices, oppressions and violence in many parts of the world. These perverse structures allow the rich to get richer and richer by depleting the rest of the world (234, A, e). This Chapter expressed the friars' concern regarding the threat of a nuclear war and invited them to contribute, in their native countries, to offer alternative solutions to ensure peace in the world (234, A, m; B, z).

4. Avila 1986

The Avila Chapter will be remembered for the formulation of the five frontiers where we have to preach the Good News. Two of these frontiers concern our commitment to justice and peace: a) the frontier between life and death: the challenges of justice and peace in the world, and b) the frontier between humanity and inhumanity: the great challenge of the excluded (22, 1-2). We have to opt for the poor, for justice and for peace in our apostolate (45). Since the friars, at that time, were experiencing the cold war, the capitulars focused mainly on peace. The capitulars reminded us for the need of

inculturation, to care for indigenous peoples (36) and migrants (37).

5. Oakland 1989

The Oakland Chapter reaffirmed what was already brought to light in the previous General Chapters. However, the capitulars added the care of creation, as another dimension of our preaching justice in the world. When our habitat and environment are destroyed, those who suffer most are the poor and the socially excluded (97). Thus, justice and peace and the care of creation are inseparable.

6. Mexico 1992

The capitulars in this Chapter tried to formulate certain challenges to our preaching ministry. One of these challenges is the phenomenon of migration, where people facing misery and death in their native countries escape and move to developed and prosperous countries with the hope of ensuring a better living. The fall of communism and wars in the Middle East brought an increase of migration towards Western Europe (66, 3). Moreover, this Chapter proposed some tools to animate us in preaching justice: a) it is the duty of every preacher and of every community; b) it has to be an integrated part of our formation; c) it has to reflect itself in our community life, prayer and liturgy; and d) it has to manifest itself in activities, which promote justice and peace, in collaboration with other members of the Dominican Family and other social movements. This Chapter insists that we administer our material goods in the service of the poor, the excluded and those suffering injustices. Moreover, the capitulars suggest that every province or vicariate has a community among the poor (66, B).

7. Caleruega 1995

The Caleruega General Chapter reminds us that as Christ took part in our human life, so we Dominicans are called to take part in the life of those who suffer injustices, by living close to them and answer to their needs (20.8). The capitulars reaffirmed the importance in our ministry to care for migrants, to listen to them, to understand them, to answer to their necessities and to build bridges through cultural and inter-religious dialogue (23). They proposed also

the formation of a Dominican NGO for human rights (24). Another important issue, raised in this Chapter, regards the external debt of developing and under-developed countries. "We require that every entity in the Order take into account questions of Third World Debt when choosing the institutions they appoint to handle their funds" (25).

8. Bologna 1998

The Bologna General Chapter reaffirmed mainly what was already promoted in the previous General Chapters, insisting more on collaboration in the Dominican Family (34, 9) and in our formation, especially in initial formation, the friars should be prepared also in matters of justice and peace (103).

9. Providence 2001

The capitulars gathered in Providence succeeded to present a very concise and synthetic analysis of the economic and financial globalisation inspired by neoliberalism or free-market fundamentalism. In this General Chapter, our Order took a critical stand and denounced the injustices and the social harm, that this socio-economic process is generating all over the world. In a second moment, the friars proposed how we can humanise globalisation, through the preaching of the Good News, in order to serve the common good.

10. Krakow 2004

In Krakow, the friars inspired themselves from God's call of Moses to liberate his people from the Egyptian slavery (Ex 3, 7-10). Like Moses, we are called to be instruments of God to free his people from evil. This passage offers us the necessary guidelines to imitate God's deeds: a) we have to see the affliction of those who are suffering; b) we have to hear and listen to their cry; c) in order to understand their sufferings; d) to descend among them; and e) to be the instruments in God's hand to take action and free his people.

11. Bogota 2007

In this General Chapter, the friars emphasised the process of listening and dialogue. Our preaching ministry has to be preceded by listening to those, who suffer, in order to understand them. Compassion is only possible if we feel with them their life experience. Moved

by compassion we have to preach hope. Very often in front of evil, we are tempted to give up, to feel helpless and hopeless. We feel too small and insignificant. Our only hope is Jesus Christ, who is our true Saviour. Therefore, we not only have to be preachers of hope, but truly people of hope, who don't give up but trust and have faith in God, who is above all forms of evil.

12. Rome 2010

Our religious life has to reflect what we preach. We cannot make compromises in administering our material goods. Our poverty, which we profess has to reflect our detachment from consumerism and the rational principle of market economy (maximum profit, with the minimum costs). We have to adopt a lifestyle, which ensure justice, peace and the care of creation, inspired by the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church.

13. Trogir 2013

The capitulars gathered in Trogir reminded us of the Salamanca process and re-proposed to implement it in today's circumstances, so that our preaching will be more effective and fruitful. This process does not regard only issues of justice and peace. The friars engaged with concrete life experience in their apostolate, have to work hand in hand with those friars engaged mainly in academic studies, as occurred in the 16th century between the missionaries in the New World and the friars of the Convent of St. Stephen in Salamanca.

14. Bologna 2016

In this General Chapter, the friars identified particular social challenges which we have to face in our preaching ministry, mainly, materialism, secularism, atheism, political polarisation, unsupportive economic development, marginalisation and indifference, individualism, social violence, racial discrimination, and threats to the institution of marriage and the family, extreme poverty, violence and war, abuse of human rights with impunity, religious fundamentalism, terrorism and corruption (74). Secondly, they gave a special attention to specific categories of people to whom we have to preach the Good News: migrants and

displaced persons; indigenous peoples; those who profess another religion; those belonging to other Christian churches or are indifferent to faith; the forgotten; the unborn, the young, and the elderly; the sick, prisoners, death row inmates, etc. (75). Our preaching has to be inspired by mercy and by the teaching of *Laudato Sì*, especially in matters of justice, peace and the care of creation.

15. *Biên Hòa 2019*

The friars reaffirmed that in our preaching ministry we have to show solidarity with the poor and those who suffer. This solidarity has to manifest itself even in the way we live our vow of evangelical poverty. The capitulars emphasised the preciousness of human life, from its conception till its natural death. Some get the impression that those, who defend life of the unborn from its conception, ignore and don't care for those, whose life is threatened by greed, exploitation, violence, human trafficking and other forms of injustices. On the other hand, those who defend

the socially and economically vulnerable, like migrants, indigenous peoples and other minorities, tend to leave aside the issues of abortion, marriage, family life and euthanasia. We have to harmonise our advocacy to defend the life of the unborn with our advocacy to defend the rights of minorities and those who suffer social injustices, material deprivation and social exclusion. Moreover, *Biên Hòa* Chapter insisted on the promulgation of the role of Justice and Peace Promoters at all levels. The Master of the Order with his council approved this promulgation on the 26th February 2020.

Conclusion

In our Dominican tradition and in these last General Chapters, we have a hidden treasure, that we need to rediscover. In these documents, we find the necessary guidelines, which inspire our Christian and Dominican life and to live our preaching ministry to the full. Our particular social and cultural context influence our understanding of preaching justice in the world. Unfortu-

nately, we tend to separate preaching the Good News from preaching social justice. Our Lord Jesus Christ in his public ministry preached the Good News to those who suffered injustices, social exclusion and were ill-treated by others. Even the Church teaches us that preaching justice is an integral part of our preaching ministry. Moreover, we tend to associate issues of social justice with certain political and economic ideologies, influenced by socialism. On the other hand, we associate preaching the preciousness of human life of the unborn, marriage and family values, with conservatives and traditionalists. We have to transcend these ideologies and acquire the necessary freedom to be faithful to our call. Our preaching ministry has to be inspired by our union with God and experience of Christ in our life. We have to offer our lives to God not to ideologies, to become his instruments of salvation, to continue Christ's mission to sanctify the whole world and the whole of mankind, as members of his Mystical Body.



«Come in un processo». L'Expositio super Iob ad litteram di san Tommaso d'Aquino

Margherita Maria Rossi, Teodora Rossi
EDS Editrice Domenicana Italiana,
Napoli, pp. 176 € 15,00

Indice

Prefazione ... p.7

Introduzione ... p.11

Capitolo I.

La missione di san Tommaso a Orvieto.

Spunti ambi(m)entali ... p.17

1. Città, cultura e società ... p.17

2. Profilo delle opere del soggiorno
orvietano: sguardo d'insieme ... p.32

Capitolo II.

**La Expositio super Iob ad litteram:
elementi costitutivi ... p.47**

1. Il prologo e i suoi temi ... p.47

2. Le fonti del prologo e della Expositio
super Iob ad litteram ... p.59

3. L'opzione per la littera ... p.71

4. Le estensioni concettuali del
prologo ... p.79

Capitolo III.

**La Expositio super Iob ad litteram:
la disputa e il processo ... p.87**

1. La lunga gestazione della disputatio ... p.87

2. Il diritto medievale e i responsa ... p.102

Capitolo IV.

**Il Libro di Giobbe e le implicazioni
dell'«ordine incerto» ... p.117**

1. La teleologia della libertà ... p.119

- a. «[...] dopo la Legge» ... p.119

- b. «[...] e dopo i Profeti» ... p.128

2. L'enigma della sofferenza
del giusto ... p.136

3. Il libro «estremo» ... p.147

4. La certezza dell'ordine ... p.150

Conclusione... p.157

Indici

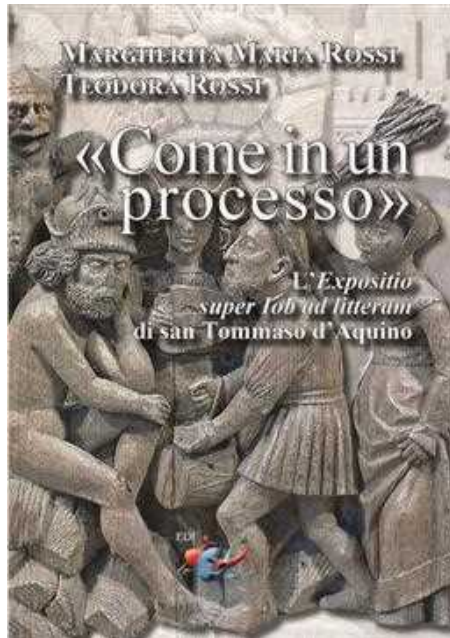
I. Indice dei nomi e delle opere ... p.167

II. Indice dei temi ... p.170

III. Indice generale ... p.175

«Come in un processo». L'«Expositio super Iob ad litteram» di San Tommaso d'Aquino

M.M. Rossi - T. Rossi



ca virtualmente capace di aperture dialogiche con le altre tradizioni religiose. La Expositio super Iob ad litteram, inoltre, è particolarmente rappresentativa della stagione epistemica che san Tommaso verosimilmente vive nel suo soggiorno orvietano, costituita dall'attenzione alla difesa delle verità del Cristianesimo in quello che si potrebbe chiamare il foro pubblico; l'opera, infatti, utilizza e valuta efficacemente tutto lo strumentario argomentativo disponibile alla tradizione cristiana che — pur presente in modo differenziato e parziale in tutte le opere dello stesso periodo — trova in questo commento l'espressione più consapevole e completa.

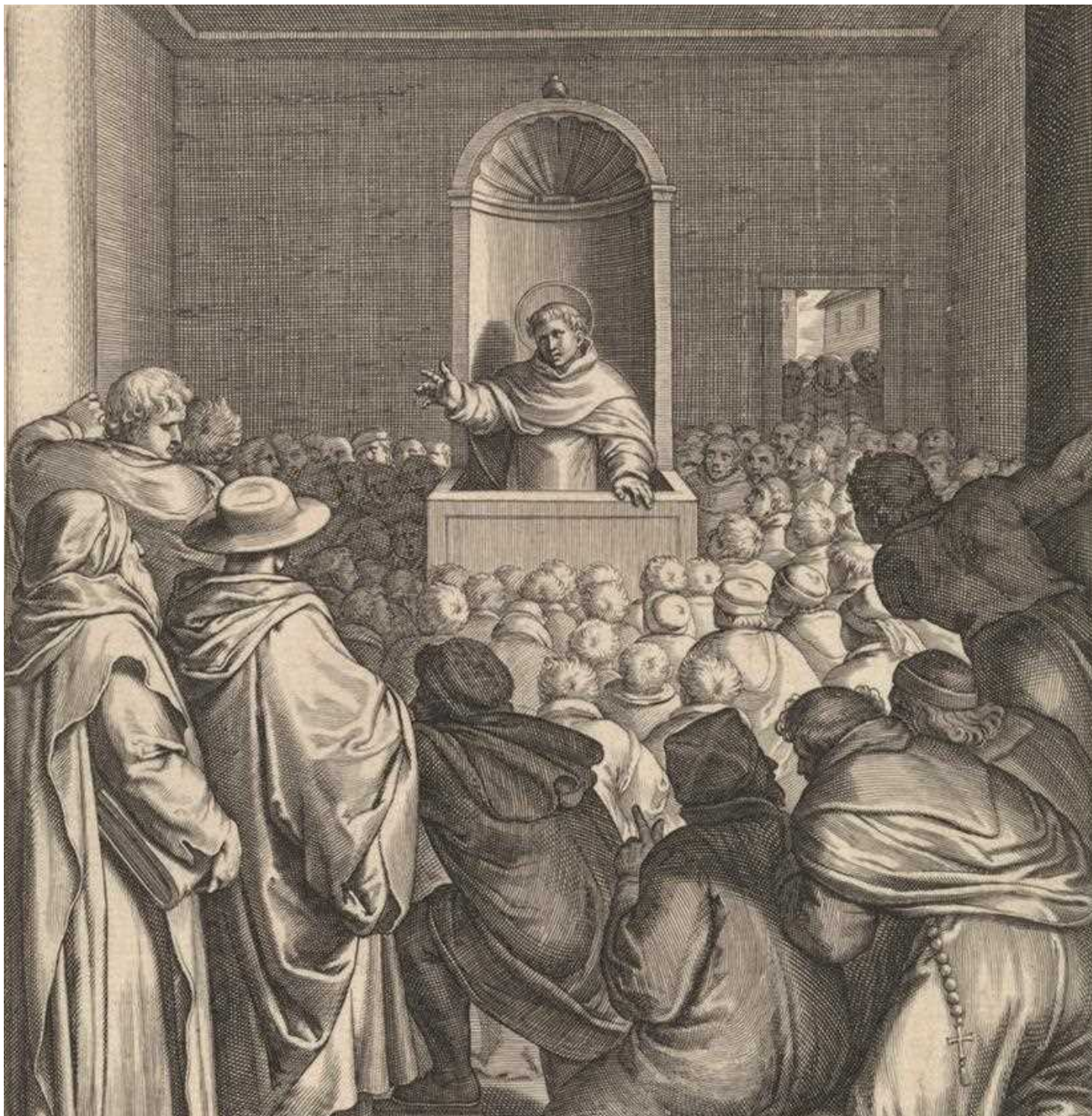
L'assunto iniziale «*bonis et malis et*

La snellezza dell'opera (pp.176) delle Docenti dell'Angelicum di Roma, che presentiamo agli studiosi e agli studenti, non deve trarre in inganno. Oltre alle dotte note e all'ampia bibliografia generale (pp. 159-166), si presenta come un commento ad una interpretazione classica del testo di Giobbe, ma soprattutto colloca il testo di Tommaso nel contesto socio-culturale di origine. Si tratta della Orvieto papale del XIII secolo, piena di discordia, eresia, processi, dispute. Su questo sfondo quasi fiabesco, ma sulla griglia storica molto realistica, si pone la riflessione tomasiana sul male e sul dolore umano. Il quadro della vita vissuta dall'Autore, in parallelo alla stesura del suo commentario biblico, lo rende vivo e meno tragicamente atemporale.

Conclusione

L'intero dispiegarsi della *Expositio super Iob ad litteram* — accostata con la lente ambi(m)entale e letta come disputa processuale — suscita uno straordinario interesse, sia in relazione alla produzione esegetica di san Tommaso, rispetto alla quale si presenta con caratteristiche specifiche ed esclusive; sia in relazione alla tradizione interpretativa dei predecessori, rispetto alla quale adotta un metodo proprio di lettura del testo; sia, infine, in relazione all'ambiente precipuo di Orvieto, rispetto al quale intende porsi come piattaforma temati-

bona et mala» attiva l'indagine sul reticolo concettuale (cosmologico, filosofico, etico e teologico) di cui si occupa il Libro di Giobbe, ponendo proletticamente questioni che daranno luogo ad accesi dibattiti dei secoli successivi: intuisce la rilevanza del problema della libertà umana nella sua portata cosmica, ma anche nella sua complessa articolazione teologica, ivi incluse le dimensioni amartologica e aretologica. Non solo: attira l'attenzione sugli aspetti linguistici: dallo statuto dei giudizi morali alla proprietà del discorso «su» Dio e fino ai principi ermeneutici per decodificare il discorso «di» Dio e alla semiotica della sofferenza. La *Expositio super Iob ad litteram*



inoltre, attirata dal dinamismo escatologico del disegno salvifico e teleologico della libertà umana verso approdi inesplorati, celebra — nella crescita di Giobbe verso una più precisa concezione di Dio — l'aspetto dinamico della fede. Fede che appare come elemento strutturale della realtà del rapporto con Dio e del modo in cui lo si vive ed esprime sia nell'orizzonte della vittoria finale del bene sul male, sia nella cornice delle vicende quotidiane, sempre lumeggiate dalla tensione escatologica. San Tommaso entra nel vivo di questa dimensione al crocevia tra storia e meta-storia con i nessi congetturali

(compatibili a un tempo con la ricostruzione giudiziaria di un evento e con la caratteristiche delle opere esegetiche): si tratta di ampie sezioni narrative che consentono il passaggio logico tra una parte e l'altra, in cui san Tommaso prosegue idealmente il discorso del personaggio di cui si occupa, o del suo ragionamento, o spiega meglio o nel dettaglio una circostanza ricorrendo a dati esperienziali per situare il lettore nella corretta prospettiva del discorso, aprendo a intonazioni e risonanze esistenziali, ma anche per legare insieme in modo plausibile parti di situazioni, discorsi o ragionamenti in

una sorta di sceneggiatura, scritta per saldare le frasi del discorso in modo che ogni personaggio sia coerente, affidabile, realistico e rappresenti un punto di vista filosofico e teologico.

Sempre marcatamente coinvolgente sia dal punto di vista narratologico che da quello logico, dunque, la *Expositio super Iob ad litteram* porta a compimento — nel disegno architettonico e nei dettagli — un ardito progetto apologetico che invita a leggere le avversità nella vita del credente come sacramento della conoscibilità di Dio.

Collaboratori / Contributors

Ivan Attard

Domenicano maltese, Licenziato e Dottorando presso la Facoltà di Scienze Sociali dell'Angelicum, Roma. Promotore di Giustizia, Pace e Creato per la Provincia Domenicana di Malta.

Francesco Compagnoni

Domenicano, Docente emerito di Teologia Morale presso l'Angelicum, Roma.

Pierre Galassi

Domenicano italiano, Docente di Teologia Sistemica presso la Facoltà Teologica dell'Emilia/Romagna. Sta concludendo la Laurea Triennale in Lingua e Cultura Cinese presso l'Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia.

Pierre Januard

Dominican, Lecturer and research fellow, PHARE, University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, France.

Mulumbet Assefa Kassa

Etiopese, Dottore e Docente di Economia Politica presso la Facoltà di Scienze Sociali dell'Angelicum, Roma.

Luigi Pisoni

Laureato in Scienze Politiche. Licenziato in Scienze Sociali. Master in Global Marketing. Dottore in Business Administration. Post-dottore in Diritto. Decano della Facoltà di Scienze Umane della "Universidad del Norte Santo Tomás de Aquino" (Argentina).

Margherita Maria Rossi e Teodora Rossi

Docenti presso la Facoltà Teologica dell'Angelicum. Redattrici della rivista «Angelicum».



OIKONOMIA

ANNO XXIII - N.3 - OTTOBRE 2024



Oikonomia è la rivista della Facoltà di Scienze Sociali (FASS) della Pontificia Università S. Tommaso di Roma (PUST). Vi collaborano i docenti, i graduati e gli studiosi che entrano in relazione di collaborazione con la FASS.

Le materie trattate sono all'interno delle scienze sociali come la nostra tradizione accademica le intende. Infatti le discipline rappresentate nella FASS sono divise in cinque aree: filosofica, giuridica, storica, psicosociale, economica.

I temi trattati negli anni durante i quali si è concretizzato il nostro profilo editoriale spaziano da quelli teoretici, alle relazioni di congressi, a recensioni di libri significativi. Particolare attenzione abbiamo posto nello scegliere ogni volta un testo del passato recente o lontano, ma che comunque fosse significativo in relazione al tema principale del fascicolo. La Pagina Classica è sempre in relazione con il contenuto dell'Editoriale. La redazione esercita una selezione basata sulla correttezza metodologica dei contributi non sul loro contenuto. Di esso i singoli autori sono gli unici responsabili scientifici.

Oikonomia is the journal of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FASS) of the Pontifical University of St Thomas in Rome (PUST). It is a collaborative project of the lecturers and students of the faculty, and of scholars who work with the FASS.

The issues that are covered are those of the social sciences, as we understand them in our tradition, covering five areas: philosophy, law, history, psychology/sociology, economics.

The subjects treated as the journal's editorial profile has developed have ranged from theoretical issues to reports on conferences, to reviews of important new books. Particular attention is given in every number to selecting a text from the recent or distant past, but which always has particular significance for the main theme of the number; this text, the "classic page", is always directly connected with the editorial.

The editorial committee ensures only that a correct methodology has been employed by the author of contributions. It does not vet the content of the articles, for which the sole responsibility lies with the authors.

Quadrimestrale

Anno XXIII – N. 3 – Ottobre 2024

Direttore Responsabile

Francesco Compagnoni OP

Assistente alla Redazione

Valerio Pierleoni

Redazione

Pontificia Università S. Tommaso

Largo Angelicum 1

00184 Roma

ITALIA

Tel: +39 06 67 02 416

E-mail: fcomp@pust.it

ISSN 1720-1691

Registrato presso il Tribunale di Roma col n. 422/2002

in data 12 luglio 2002

