

Unity in Development Work in Multilateral Organizations

Patrick Njoroge

Economist at the International Monetary Fund in Washington, DC.

My experience in development work in a multilateral organization demonstrates how peoples of diverse backgrounds can come together in the pursuit of a common goal¹. While the most radical unifying factor may be absent for across these diverse groups, a sincere and deep friendship that arises in the context of the daily activities is often the starting point towards the radical uniting factor. In addition to being exemplary professionals, it is the task of Catholics who work in such occupations to study the Catholic social doctrine and to explain it to their colleagues.

‘Made perfectly one’. I have often been struck by the aptness of this phrase. Like everyone else, I am struck by the almost daily news reports of violent and savage brutalities stemming from religious, racial, ethnic, historical or other differences and forms of intolerance. The phrase, however, resonates continuously in the context of my work in a multilateral development institution.

The reality of the diversity of peoples, cultures and experiences, is something of which one finds frequent reminders within the type of institution where I work, not only as manifested in the diversity of its staff but also by the nations and peoples that it represents and serves. However, the fact that the differences inherent to such diversity are widely evident should not obviate the need to join together as partners in the pursuit of a common goal, setting aside any such differences and opposing them when these are divisive. There is a Swahili word that captures this spirit: *Harambee*.

¹ The author would welcome any comments on the present text. The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Fund. The author’s email address is pnjoroge@imf.org

The story of the influence of Blessed Josemaría in my life really began long before I joined the International Monetary Fund (IMF), at least as far back as my years in high school in Kenya where I grew up. My parents wanted us to have the best education, and that is how my brother and I ended up enrolling in Strathmore College for the last two years of high school. What I did not know then was the impact that those two years would have on me. At Strathmore we were not only given excellent academic instruction; the development of the whole self was also fostered. This was embodied in the College's 'three pillars': academic excellence, friendship and the love of God. Strathmore was founded by some of the first faithful of Opus Dei in Kenya and their friends, with the encouragement of Blessed Josemaría. It was at Strathmore that I first got acquainted with his teaching and writings.

When the project to build Strathmore started in the pre-independence Kenya of the early sixties, the founders soon ran into serious difficulties. The most severe problem turned out to be that the existing legislation did not envisage an educational institution that would accept students regardless of race. The founders, on the other hand, could not conceive of an institution that would accept or reject students on the grounds of race, religion or ethnic background. Suffices to say that this difficulty — insurmountable as it seemed — was finally overcome and the first multiracial high school in Eastern Africa was opened. Incidentally, and as the Principal pointed out to us on several occasions, Blessed Josemaría followed closely these and subsequent developments and his encouragement helped sustain them against the great odds. As a testament to this history, the College's distinctive coat of arms has three hearts lined up at the top, representing the three races that were brought together with its foundation. It was in this institution that I first experienced a community of persons from widely different backgrounds, teachers and students alike, who were joined in the harmonious pursuit of their goals.

Years later, this theme keeps recurring in my professional occupation as an economist at the IMF. First and foremost, my colleagues are drawn from different national, religious and ethnic backgrounds, comprising a diversity that is virtually irreproducible at any non-international institution.

Expectedly, strong friendships have developed with those colleagues with whom I work closely. These friendships have blossomed not only because we have experienced together both professional successes and failures, but also by sharing our own personal triumphs, concerns and difficulties. I recall, for instance, being on a business trip a few years ago with a colleague who was concerned about his wife who was going through a difficult pregnancy. Aside from listening to him and offering the usual comfort, I promised to pray for that intention, something for which he was very grateful. A few weeks later I joined him in celebrating the birth of a beautiful daughter! Conversely, I recall how at about

the same time, this and other colleagues came to my support during a family tragedy. The strength of their comfort helped sustain me through that difficult period. Through these and similar incidences, my colleagues and I have formed remarkable friendships.

While our diversity finds expression in a variety of ways, it is most apparent in our views on religious and moral issues, in a word, on the perennial questions of humanity. Discussion of these topics arises quite naturally in the context of these friendships, as do other casual topics. I recall several discussions I have had with a Jewish colleague, on the religious education of his children. Or the discussions I have had with another colleague about the baptism of infants. While we may not always come to an agreement on these issues, and while I am firmly convinced about the truth of my beliefs, we still undertake to discuss them in our conversations, which are filled with mutual respect.

I have reflected on Blessed Josemaría's teachings on how, while respecting human freedom and being enriched by diversity, a society can be built that is inspired by a balanced view of humanity. As he emphatically taught, all peoples can be united in Christ, and based on Christ's charity. At one point, he said that those "who aspire to unity should be shown Christ who prays that we will all be *consummati in unum*: 'made perfectly one'². Hunger for justice should lead us to the original source of harmony among mankind: the fact that we are, and know ourselves to be, sons of the Father, brothers"³. This vision is also shared by Pope John Paul II. In writing about the crisis in our civilization, he states that "this must be countered by the civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty, which find full attainment in Christ"⁴.

An immediate conclusion from these considerations, therefore, is that I need to be united to Christ. To this end, my daily effort to seek sanctity and to sanctify my work finds expression, rooted in a spirit of divine filiation that leads to a very familiar dealing with God and a trusting abandonment in His providence. Secondly, I have learnt to see my work as a means to draw others to God, through my example and specific help offered to my colleagues. Further, for my work to meet these goals, I need to carry it out well. Coming a full circle, the three pillars that founded my high school education — academic excellence, friendship and the love of God — pillars so deeply rooted in the spirit of Blessed Josemaría, and ones which accentuate the inseparable unity between work, apostolate and one's relationship with God, have continued to find meaning in a different environment.

² Jn 17:23.

³ *Christ is passing by*, 157.

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apost. Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 52.

Working at an institution like the IMF reveals the urgent task that remains in the development of nations, despite the remarkable progress already achieved over the last fifty years. A large proportion of the world's population remains trapped in abject poverty, with low standards of living, poor food security, scarce water supply, poor health and educational opportunities, etc. These conditions in turn generate and are compounded by other problems — unemployment, poor health, high infant mortality, famines, urban crime, drug addiction, etc. — all of which further marginalize these segments of the population and present a real threat to the economic and political stability of the entire society. These depraving conditions can hardly be ignored and call for a rapid redress. My work contributes to this effort.

On a day-to-day basis, my work involves designing macroeconomic policies that would foster high quality economic growth for a given country. For the most part, the job is fairly technical, provides a regular dose of tension and drama, and like any other job, an equal share of joys and disappointments. While my daily efforts may appear disproportionately small against the overall task of development, I am certain that doing each part of my job with both human and supernatural perfection will convert these ordinary tasks into a significant contribution for mankind. As Blessed Josemaría said, “Every activity — be it of great importance or not — must become for you a means to serve Our Lord and your fellowmen. That is the true measure of its importance”⁵.

Blessed Josemaría's teachings underscore the importance of technical competence in carrying out our daily duties, and in particular he emphasised study and professionalism. This also has direct applicability in the field of development. However, this applies not only on the study of the technical aspects of our profession but also with regard to a thorough understanding of the social teachings of the Church. As Blessed Josemaría taught, we need to know the thought of the Pope and bring it into our everyday lives⁶. Over the last few years I have increased my appreciation of the need for a regular study of the social teachings of the Church. This is in part due to the significant strides that have been made during the papacy of John Paul II towards an extension and deepening of Catholic social teachings, and the wide availability of this material.

Consequently, for those of us working in the field of development, I see our twofold task as to allow the technical aspects of an issue to be informed by other sciences, and also to take up the challenge of deepening the understanding of the social teachings of the Church. This would allow the placement of devel-

⁵ *The Forge*, 684.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 633.

opment work in the context of other disciplines and sciences, and *in fine*, in the context of the ultimate goals of humanity. As Pope John Paul II reminded us: “Development which is not only economic must be measured and oriented according to the reality and vocation of man seen in his totality, namely, according to his interior dimension [...]. [D]evelopment cannot consist only in the use, dominion over, and indiscriminate possession of created things and the products of human industry, but rather in subordinating the possessions, dominion and the use to man’s likeness and to his vocation to immortality”⁷.

I am not unique in my interest to study more deeply the social teachings of the Church. Over the last few years I have distributed among my friends and colleagues such material and especially the writings of the Pope, all of which have been very well received. I have tried to relate the document with an issue that we had recently discussed, but at other times I have just suggested reading a recent document and followed it up with a later conversation. It is my conviction that through these efforts, small as they may seem, the wealth of the Catholic Church will be made available to a wider circle of people, who in turn will pass it on to yet another circle.

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Enc. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 29.