

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN CATHOLIC TEACHING¹

(PART I)

by Edward Malatesta

Throughout her history, the Catholic Church has been concerned with the total well-being of human persons and of human society. The Church has paid attention to the human condition on earth because, according to her faith, the way life is lived on earth determines how life will be lived in the age to come.

But the understanding of members of the Church is conditioned, like the minds of all people, by historical events and by the new insights that time and experience provide. The form taken by the industrial revolution in the last century and the serious social problems it caused, led Leo XIII to offer in 1891 the first major document of Catholic social teaching in modern times, the encyclical Rerum Novarum (On the Condition of Workers). From then until the present, the bishops of Rome have evolved a social doctrine which has addressed major problems of modern society with a depth that has merited the respect of many outside the Catholic Church. In addition to such teaching, the Second Vatican Council provided a unique occasion for the bishops of most of the world to teach together on social questions. The creation of national and regional bishops' conferences has provided forums for still further reflection and instruction.(2)

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the contemporary Church at every level is precisely a new sensitivity to the gravity and urgency of many social issues. There is a new awareness of the serious responsibility Catholics have to contribute, in collaboration with all persons of good will, to the solution of these problems.

The following pages will attempt first to show briefly some of the reflection regarding one issue, namely that of social development, as elaborated in different geographical regions of the Church. Secondly, we will see how these attitudes and positions on the local level flow from the orientations given by the Second Vatican Council, the 1971 Synod on Justice, and the social teachings of Popes John XXIII and Paul VI. The third part will present some main characteristics of contemporary Catholic social teaching.

1. REFLECTION FROM FIVE CONTINENTS

A. Latin America: From Medellin (1968) to Puebla (1979)

It is the Church in Latin America which has given the most striking example of commitment to the poor, of generous efforts towards conscientization of the masses, of community building, and of heroic fidelity to the Christian ideals of justice and love in face of harrassment of all kinds, imprisonment, torture and death. The Catholic Church throughout the world continues to be inspired and moved by the witness of the Latin American Church.

The social problems of the various contries which make up this vast continent are perennial and overwhelming. In face of them and in response to the suffering which is the lot of many millions of persons, the bishops have given strong leadership through their collective teaching and often through their personal example. The bishops have been assisted in their task by the significant contributions made by theologians, social scientists, and pastoral workers. In a population so vast, excesses both to the left and to the right are to be expected, but these only put into better perspective the very valuable work done by so many dedicated Catholics.

In 1968 Pope Paul VI was present in Medellin, Colombia when the Latin American bishops opened their Second General Conference. The theme was "The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America".

The Medellin statement on Justice clearly affirms how the Christian doctrine of love should be at the basis of all social action:

Love, 'the fundamental law of human perfection, and therefore of the transformation of the world' (Gaudium et Spes, 38), is not only the greatest commandment of the Lord; it is also the dynamism which ought to motivate Christians to realize justice in the world, having truth as a foundation and liberty as their sign...

We have faith that our love for Christ and our brethren will not only be the great force liberating us from injustice and oppression, but also the inspiration for social justice, understood as a whole way of life and as an impulse toward the integral growth of our countries (4-5).(3)

The document Poverty of the Church is one of the most striking implementations of Vatican II's desire that the Church become the Church of the poor:

We, the bishops, wish to come closer to the poor in sincerity and brotherhood, making ourselves accessible to them...(9).

We wish our houses and style of life to be modest, our clothing simple, our works and institutions functional, without show or ostentation.

We ask priests and faithful to treat us in conformity with our mission as fathers and pastors, for we desire to renounce honorable titles belonging to another era (12).

In the introduction to their Conclusions, the bishops state:

Latin America is obviously under the sign of transformation and development; a transformation that, besides taking place with extraordinary speed, has come to touch and influence every human activity, from the economic to the religious.

This indicates that we are on the threshold of a new epoch in the history of our continent. It appears to be a time full of zeal for full emancipation, of liberation from every form of servitude, of personal maturity and of collective integration. In these signs we perceive the first indications of the painful birth of a new civilization. And we cannot fail to see in this gigantic effort toward a rapid transformation and development an obvious sign of the Spirit who leads the history of man and of peoples toward their vocation.

Eleven years later in June 1979, Pope John Paul II was in Puebla, Mexico for the opening of the Third General conference of the Latin American episcopate. The theme of the meeting was "Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America". The final document of the conference contains 1310 numbered paragraphs.(4)

Regarding the question of development, the only paragraph indicated by the index under this title is a very sombre one:

In particular we must note that since the decade of the fifties, and despite certain achievements, the ample hopes for development have come to nothing. The marginalization of the vast majority and the exploitation of the poor has increased (1260).

But part II, ch. II, section 4 is devoted to "Evangelization, Liberation, and Human Promotion". The bishops encourage their people to continue the work which followed upon Medellin:

Clearly, then, it is the whole Christian community, in communion with its legitimate pastors and guided by them, that is the responsible subject of evangelization, liberation, and human promotion (474).

The document also stresses that the primary object of the Church's social teaching is the personal dignity of each human being and the protection of all inalienable human rights:

As the need has arisen, the Church has proceeded to spell out its teaching with regard to other areas of life: social life, economics, politics, and cultural life. But the aim of this doctrine of the Church, which offers its own specific vision of the human being and humanity (Populorum Progressio, 13), is always the the promotion and integral liberation of human beings in terms of

both their earthly and their transcendent dimensions. It is a contribution to the construction of the ultimate and definitive Kingdom, although it does not equate earthly progress with Christ's Kingdom (Gaudium et Spes, 39) (475).

Two long sections are dedicated to "Discerning the Nature of Liberation in Christ" (480-490) and "Liberative Evangelization for a Human Societal Life Worthy of the Children of God" (491-506).(5)

B. Europe

The Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Church in France has offered a profound reflection on the challenge raised by the violently unjust relationship between the rich, exploitative northern hemisphere and the poor, economically dominated southern hemisphere.(6)

The document warns against three temptations which when yielded to only continue to prevent the solidarity that should characterize relationships between countries:

1) The weakening of our capacity for indignation and compassion. We can become too used to the appalling statistics of human misery actually present in our world and abandon ourselves to a kind of fatalism that accepts such a condition as normal.

2) Egoism, turning in on oneself. For those hard pressed at times even in the northern hemisphere by unemployment or other serious economic difficulties, there is the understandable tendency only to think of themselves. But the problem is that people of the wealthier nations on the whole tend to use their resources only to satisfy their own needs and even to provide themselves with superfluties while doing very little to assist those who are destitute.

3) Scepticism and weariness after more than 20 years of attempts at some, even if minimal aid to developing countries. Some of those dedicated to the cause of mutual assistance can be inclined to give up because the results are so meager or because in some cases aid to developing countries has only helped to create "a bourgeoisie and a political, economic, financial, military and sometimes even religious oligarchy inattentive to the future of the urban or rural masses who either are unorganized or whose organizations are crushed." Other generous helpers despair when they see that certain forms of presence of the wealthy countries in developing nations, which supposedly designed to assist, in fact only destroy traditional forms of society and culture while not providing a more satisfactory economic situation or a form of existence adapted to the dispositions of the local population.

Indeed "there is a real crisis in the theory and practice of development". The Justice and Peace Commission sees this crisis not as a reason for discouragement but rather as a challenge to be answered with

imagination and courage. The kind of progress and its consequences experienced by the "developed" countries has occasioned many serious moral and social difficulties. And so the question can be raised: "Should we not try another kind of development, less burdensome, wiser, more complete, more attentive to others, more humanly fulfilling? Because the model we have followed has its shadows and cannot be exported to others without disadvantage to them, why not try another way?"

There are three reasons, among others, why Christians of the north are called upon, in the name of their faith, to join the ranks of those active in the North-South dialogue:

1) The Church to which they belong is involved in the relation of North to South for half of all Christians live in the wealthier part of the world. It is their countries which "exploit the South, arrogantly dominate the economic, cultural and even religious fields, continue to develop - although they are not the only ones - arms with a potential that already long ago was insane, thus depriving the planet of financial means, of equity and a truly human way of existing; obstinately refuse any dialogue which would lead to the birth of a new world order which so many men and women ardently hope for."

2) Those who call themselves Christian cannot legitimize the domination of one group over another and the violence that accepts such domination. Rather it is their responsibility to inaugurate relationships of mutual sharing, of partnership among individuals, groups and nations. For these characterize that kind of new people to which the Church should give witness.

3) The present state of the world invites Christians to a spirit of "solidarity composed both of compassion and commitment to justice, which reflects the power of the passion and resurrection of Jesus".

If because of the egoism of Christians the governments of "Christian" countries of the North maintain unjust, exploitative policies regarding the nations of the South, a change of heart in Christian citizens should lead to changes in the comportment of the governments which represent them.

C. Africa

1. Algeria

To answer the temptation to discouragement in face of the slow, complex process of creating a new society in Algeria, the Justice and Peace Council of the Catholic dioceses of that country wished to recall the unshakeable motives of hope in the future of man given to us by our Christian faith.(7)

In Jesus, we discover that each person is born because of the loving design of God and is destined to develop through communion

with other persons. No society is cursed. God never despairs of anyone. He offers His love, in ways that only He knows, to each person and each group... These certitudes of faith invite us to change our way of looking at the history of persons and peoples.

Aware of the obstacles to development in their country (demographic pressure, dependance on imports for food, lack of professional training, insufficient motivation for workers, lack of professional conscience, indifference to the common good, need for space, for freedom and creativity, the weight of certain structures of family or state, etc.), the Algerian commission nonetheless recognizes that every country, in a certain sense, is poorly developed. Development is a never-ending process by which each society seeks to assure its members of political independence, financial security, personal growth, cultural advancement.

The first condition for undertaking a process of development is the possession of hope in man and a sharing of this hope with others. A climate of hopefulness can sustain dedication to the efforts and sacrifices which are necessary for true progress.

Finally, the commission recommends Algerian Catholics to collaborate with all persons of good will to realize the objectives set forth in Populorum Progressio.

2. A Meeting in Tanzania

J. Nyerere, president of Tanzania, addressed the opening of the Eighth General Assembly of "International Cooperation for Socio-Economic Development", an association formed in 1967 by Catholic organizations from the five continents to aid the developing countries. The meeting was held in Dar-es-Salaam, February 10-15, 1981.(8)

According to Nyerere, the Church has a twofold role in the promotion of development: 1) The Church by teaching Christian ethics and the responsibilities of persons endowed with a conscience, helps individuals to develop their personal integrity. 2) The Church deliberately encourages activities designed for community development.

The Church assists the growth of peace and justice within a society because no matter what social-economic system the State adopts, peace and justice depend finally on the integrity, honesty, discipline and commitment of individuals.

Nyerere affirms the compatibility of the objectives of the socialist state - promotion in the world of human equality and social justice - with Christian doctrine.

He praises the activity of the Church in small as well as larger initiatives and encourages action within the developed countries leading toward the establishment of a new international order.

D. North America

The Catholic bishops of the United States are now organized in two ways. There is the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) which is a canonical body, based upon the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church. This organization is concerned with matters pertaining to the inner life of the Church such as liturgy, the training of candidates for ministries, etc. The second organization, called the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), is a civil entity. While its members are still all bishops, its structures that decide policies include lay people, priests and religious. This organization includes a Department of Social Development and World Peace and an agency called the Campaign for Human Development.

A recently published book brings together statements on domestic and foreign policy made by these two organizations and their various components between 1966 and 1980.(9) For our present purpose, it will suffice to offer a few citations to show the concern of the United States bishops for integral human development throughout the world and their awareness of the particular responsibility of their country in this regard.

Our nation's power, wealth, and position of leadership in the world impose special obligations upon us... We must work creatively for a just international order based on recognition of interdependence. We must live by the principle that all nations and peoples are entitled to an equitable share of the world's goods as well as respect for their right of self-determination.

The values which comprise the international common good are threatened by existing patterns of international political and economic relations. Our lives, policies, and patterns of consumption and production should be examined in light of their impact on other nations and peoples.

The discussion of international justice and of institutions for its realization has become more specific as a result of the call at the United Nations for a New International Economic Order... New rules would clarify obligations among the parties. Politically, they would be designed to improve the bargaining position of the developing nations in relation to the industrialized countries.(10)

Closely related to the question of a new international economic system are the problems presented by the multinational corporations. The role of American businesses in Latin America, for example, led the United States bishops to take a strong position in this regard:

Evidence is mounting that the concentrated power in the hands of a relatively few multinational corporations and banks inhibits international development and deters the process of achieving justice here and abroad. Realization is growing that so-called economic development and the resultant growth in Gross National

Product (GNP) does not assure the amelioration of the harsh living conditions of the vast majority of people of the Third World.

The oppressive conditions of poverty and marginality frequently result from the influx of foreign private capital. The fact concentrated economic power results in enriching 30% of a population in Latin America at the expense of the other 70% indicts it as a major impediment to world justice. Such concentrated power, motivated by the worldwide maximization of profits, leads to the development and control of an international market strategy which is of primary benefit to the controlling power and not to the development of peoples...

The time is at hand for us not only to question the enormous power wielded by so few people and institutions, but in a more fundamental way, to question the underlying motivation behind such unbridled power. For the motivation continually to increase profit emerges from values which promote excessive individualism, unnecessary consumption, and disregard for the quality of human life, all of which are contrary to the deepest values of the Judeo-Christian tradition.(11)

E. Asia

Towards the end of 1965, while the Catholic bishops were in Rome for the final session of the Second Vatican Council, 150 Catholic priests of Asia met in Hong Kong at the 1965 Priests' Institute of Social Action. Eighteen of the participants were already fulltime workers in social action. The meeting resulted in giving new energy to such work on the part of the Church in most of Asia.

In June, 1969, some forty persons - bishops, laymen and priests from Asia - met at Baguio in the Philippines to exchange experiences in the field of social work. At that meeting, they decided to set up a Catholic office of social action to serve East and Southeast Asia. The office, located in Manila, was intended to serve as a secretariat to favor communication between bishops of various Asian countries, to promote research in the field of social questions, and to link social action with other Church ministries such as mass media and education.

In Manila in 1970, on the occasion of the visit of Pope Paul VI, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences was established. After discussions in March and December of 1971, the Asian bishops decided to expand the decision of the Baguio meeting and establish an Office for Human Development (OHD) to be at the service of the Church in all the Asian countries represented in the FABC.

One of the activities of the OHD has been to organize Bishops' Institutes for Social Action (BISA) for the bishops of Asia. To date the

following meetings have been held with the participation of bishops from the countries indicated:

- BISA I - Novaliches, Manila, Philippines, March 1-15, 1974
20 bishops from Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Philippines
- BISA II - Tokyo, April 7-19, 1975
16 bishops from Korea, Taiwan, Hongkong, Macao, Japan
- BISA III - Kuala Lumpur, November 2-16, 1975
27 bishops from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh
- BISA IV - Philippines, February 28 - March 8, 1978
23 bishops from India, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, South Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand
- 8 guest bishops from Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea
- BISA V - Baguio City, Philippines, May 21 - June 1, 1979
21 bishops from Japan, Korea, Philippines, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia
- 16 guest bishops from Fiji, Tahiti, New Hebrides, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, England, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Canada, United States

The main purpose of these gatherings was to assist the bishops to become more aware of the various dimensions of the major social problems of Asia, and to provide professional assistance in analyzing these problems and in elaborating programs of cooperative action.(12)

FOOTNOTES:

1. The writer was very happy to accept the gracious invitation of the editor of Tripod to write on this theme. It is his hope that the readers may find this article, in spite of its limitations, a helpful source of information.

2. Highly to be recommended is Joseph Gremillion, The Gospel of Peace and Justice. Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1976. Besides offering English translations of all the major documents, the book contains a compact, thorough and expert analysis of Catholic social teaching from 1961 to 1975 (cf. pp. 1-138).

3. The translation used here is taken from The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, vol. 2, Conclusions, the official English edition published by the Latin American

Bureau of the United States Catholic Conference and the General Secretariat of the Latin American Episcopal Council, as quoted by Joseph Tremillion, The Gospel of Peace and Justice, pp. 445-476.

4. An official English translation made by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C. is available in Puebla, Middle green/ London, St. Paul Publications/Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1980, pp. 36-220.

5. For an introduction to contemporary Latin American theology, see Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, London, SCM Press, 1974; John Sobrino, S.J., Christology at the Crossroads, London/Maryknoll, N.Y., SCM/Orbis Books, 1978; Rosino Gibellini, ed., Frontiers of Theology in Latin America, London, SCM Press Ltd., 1980. Appendix I, pp. 305-318 is entitled "Biographical and Bibliographic Data on the Contributors".

6. "Nord-Sud: Le défi", Documentation catholique, May 3, 1981, no. 1807, pp. 434-438.

7. Documentation catholique, April 5, 1981, no. 1805, pp. 359-361.

8. Documentation catholique, June 21, 1981, no. 1810, pp. 598-603.

9. J. Brian Benestad and Francis J. Butler, co-editors, Quest for Justice, Washington, D.C., United States Catholic Conference, 1981.

10. "To Live in Christ Jesus. A Pastoral Reflection on the Moral Life." NCCB, Nov. 11, 1976, in Quest for Justice, pp. 42-43.

11. USCC, Department of Social Development and World Peace, August 1974, "Development-Dependency: the Role of Multinational Corporations", in Quest for Justice, pp. 108-109; 112. For an informative overview, see G. Bertin and Ph. Laurent, S.J., "Transnational Corporations", Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin, no. 75, Nov. - Dec., 1978.

12. Detailed information on the contents of these meetings is available in the FABC Papers (FABC, G.P.O. Box 2984, Hong Kong) and in the bulletin "Information on Human Development" published by OHD (P.O. Box EA-12, Manila). For the history and evaluation of Catholic contributions to development in India during the last 30 years, see Walter Fernandes, S.J., "Christians and Development in India Today", Vidyajyoti (Journal of Theological Reflection, edited from the Institute of Religious Studies, Vidyajyoti, Delhi, India) 44 (1980) 61-75; 98-107.