

# Principles of Engagement on International Development Through the Lens of Catholic Social Teaching<sup>1</sup>

The social mission of the Church is one of the three central tenets of the faith along with celebrating the sacraments and the preaching of the Word of God. It is not an optional extra to the faith but intrinsic to it. Pope Paul VI wrote: “For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new...for the Church it is not only preaching the Gospel but also of affecting and, as it were, upsetting... mankind’s criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life which are in contrast with the word of God and the plan of salvation.”<sup>2</sup>

The social mission of the Church is about ushering in the Reign of God and incarnating those values in all cultures and in all people regardless of faith.

The framework for that mission is found in Catholic Social Teaching principles. These principles provide a moral framework for viewing society which ensures that the good of the individual and the common good of humanity coalesce.

A summary of a Catholic Social Teaching (CST) view of development might be: it is not limited to economic

growth but is holistic, covering all spheres of life – the economic, political, cultural, personal and spiritual. It should promote the dignity of the human person and the common good. It is a transition from less human conditions to more human ones and is, in Pope Paul VI’s phrase, “the new name for peace”<sup>3</sup>. Peace is not just the cessation of violence but intimately linked to justice – in Second Vatican Council parlance, it is an “enterprise of justice”<sup>4</sup>.

The poorest should have priority and they should be the subjects of their own development, not the object of someone else’s idea of how they should be developed. That requires maximum participation by the poor and vulnerable in all decisions and programs affecting their community.

Subsidiarity should be a way of promoting initiative. The right to development in CST is based on “unity of origin and a shared destiny of the human family, equality between every person and every community based on human dignity, the universal destination of the Earth’s goods, the notion of development as ‘integral human development’ and the centrality of the human person and solidarity”<sup>5</sup>.

An individualistic approach to development regards the human

person as autonomous with rights in a contractual view of society whereas the natural law approach favoured in Church teaching regards the human person as a social being with multiple ties and obligations to the rest of humanity, not as matter of choice but by nature. What follows is a dignity-based approach to development.

The table over illustrates the CST theme (or principle) with a CST quote and gives a statement of what the principle means, examples of characteristics international development programs based on CST principles may display and, lastly, posits practical questions. It is meant as a guide for those who wish to serve others in developing countries and is a work in progress.

<sup>1</sup> Catholic Social Teaching consists of “principles for reflection, the criteria for judgement and the directives for action which are the starting point of an integral humanism based on solidarity”, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 2004 p 3.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Proclaiming the Gospel (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*, 1975, #18-19, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>3</sup> Pope Paul VI, *The Progress of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)*, 1967, #76, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>4</sup> Second Vatican Council, *The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, 1965, #78, Austin Flannery OP, *Vatican Council II Documents*, Dominican Publications 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* #446.

# Themes

# Statement of Principles

## Dignity of the Human Person

*"Whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children as well as disgraceful working conditions... are infamies indeed."* Second Vatican Council, *The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, 1965, #27

This is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Human beings are created in the divine image and have an inherent dignity which must always be upheld. Human life is therefore sacred.

## The Common Good

*"... the common good... is... the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members... access to their own fulfillment."* Second Vatican Council, *The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, 1965, #26

Human beings are not only sacred but social – we become human in relationship to others. Community has to be built up and organised in such a way that the dignity of all is maintained. The community that is built up has to be fair and just and allow the participation of everyone in the enjoyment of the goods of Creation.

## Preferential Option for the Poor

*"The struggle against destitution... is not enough. It is a question, rather, of building a world where every person... can live a fully human life... and where the poor man Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man."* Pope Paul VI, *The Progress of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)*, 1967, #47.

A basic moral test of how society is faring is in its treatment of the most vulnerable whose needs should come first.

## Rights and Duties

*"A well-ordered human society requires that people recognize and observe their mutual rights and duties. It also demands that each contribute generously to the establishment of a civic order in which rights and duties are more sincerely and effectively acknowledged and fulfilled."* Blessed Pope John XXIII, *Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris)*, 1963, #31

Human dignity can be protected and the common good upheld only if human rights are cherished and corresponding duties – to family and society – are carried out.

## Participation

*"Development programs... need to be flexible; and the people who benefit from them ought to be directly involved in their planning and implementation."* Pope Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth (Caritas In Veritate)*, 2009, #47

It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community.

## Economic Justice

*"... the remuneration of work is not something that can be left to the laws of the marketplace; nor should it be a decision left to the will of the more powerful. ... Workers must be paid a wage which allows them to live a truly human life and to fulfill their family obligations in a worthy manner."* Blessed Pope John XXIII, *Mother and Teacher (Mater et Magistra)*, 1961, #71

The economy, including the market, must serve the people, not the reverse. People are more important than things and labour is more important than capital. The economy must be directed to a just and equitable distribution of resources.

## Solidarity

*"It is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good... to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all."* Pope John Paul II, *On Social Concern (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis)*, 1987, #38

Human beings constitute one human family, no matter the differences. 'Loving your neighbour' has global dimensions in an interdependent world.

## Stewardship of Creation

*"The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole."* Pope Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate)*, 2009, #48

As sojourners on Earth, we are called to show respect not only for people but for all Creation.

## Promotion of Peace

*"Peace is not merely an absence of war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies... Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice."* Second Vatican Council, *The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* 1965, #78

Peace is a positive, action-oriented concept not just the absence of war. It implies 'right relationships' between people, between groups, between people and the environment and between people and their idea of the transcendent. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings.

## Role of Government/Subsidiarity

*"It is clearly laid down that the paramount task assigned to government officials is that of recognizing, respecting, reconciling, protecting and promoting the rights and duties of citizens."* Blessed Pope John XXIII, *Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris)*, 1963, #77  
*"The characteristic implication of subsidiarity is participation..."* Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004, #189

The role of government is to promote human dignity, protect human rights and build the common good. It therefore has a positive moral purpose. It should assist citizens in fulfilling their responsibility to others. Promoting subsidiarity means functions of government should be performed at the lowest level possible consistent with participation above. When the lower level cannot respond, then it is for the higher levels of government to intervene. This also applies to authentic partnership practices.

# Characteristics

# Challenges

All programs must promote the dignity of all involved. That entails programs being people-centred with empowerment at their heart rather than technology-centred.  
No program should be undertaken which treats people in any way as commodities.

Is the program holistic, covering all aspects of life and will it lead to human flourishing?  
In what way is the program sensitive to culture and religious belief?  
Are non-liberative cultural practices or stigma being identified and addressed and, if so, through what strategies?

Priority will be given to development programs which involve collaboration with all relevant sectors of the community to promote the common good.  
It will also involve coordination of resources, planning and action across agencies and organisations.  
Good development increases the sum of social capital.

Is the program in which you serve really geared towards the good of the local community? Is the service you are rendering really relevant to the community and especially the poor and vulnerable within that community?  
What are the mechanisms being used to listen deeply to the wishes of the community?

Reaching the poorest and most marginalised often requires greater effort in discovering where they are to be found.  
That might mean additional resources of time and money.

In what way will this program empower the poor and how will it be sustained? What criteria have been used to develop the program? How effectively has a social analysis identified those most at risk or in need? Have initiatives been designed with strong participation of local leaders representing a broad range of stakeholders (across religious, ethnic etc lines)?  
Is the program burdening certain groups, eg does it lead to genuine social participation for women?

Partnerships for social change must be based on mutual respect and trust.  
Mutuality within partnerships incorporates listening to one another, transparency, probity, flexibility, joint planning and accountability and working through potential conflict situations.

Is cooperation being fostered? Is everyone committed to being accountable and transparent and aware of what that means in a common culture? Does the program lead participants to feeling responsibility for others and the community? Is there a clear delineation of task and responsibilities of all stakeholders?

Stakeholders in the local community must be involved in consultation, planning, implementation and evaluation of the program.

What power dynamics exist in this program and in the community? What mechanisms are in place to allow local people to assume leadership within the program? What mechanisms are in place to ensure the 'beneficiaries' become, in Amartya Sen's phrase, 'doers' and 'judges' of the program?

It is necessary to ensure there is no exploitation of community groups.  
Justice means to be vigilant against, in Naomi Klein's phrase, 'disaster capitalism' which involves elites taking over land or other resources of the poor in the wake of a catastrophe in the name of 'development'.

How does the program invest resources so that the change sought is sustained over time? How does the program provide access to other kinds of growth and development?  
Is there a huge gulf between expat and local salaries as well as living conditions?  
Are people being remunerated in a just way?

Development is to reach those who are most marginalised and is to give expression to the principle of human solidarity.  
A commitment to long-term engagement and sustainability is necessary.

Is solidarity being 'inculcated' into the community so that they care and are responsible for one another? What is your motivation for participating in the program – to 'do good' or to accompany the poor and marginalised and be transformed? How would you gauge such 'transformation'?

Development programs will be attentive to environmental concerns and seek to minimise environmental damage.  
Opportunities should be built for good stewardship of all resources.

Is the environment being safeguarded and has the community been trained in the importance of this?  
What might be the unintended consequences of your presence on the environment and local community (financial and social as well as the strictly environmental)? Might it lead to duplication, corruption or the displacement of a local person?

All programs should be conflict-sensitive.  
Hope which animates action is vital in order to move towards development and transformation for individuals and communities since "development is the new name for peace" (Pope Paul VI, The Progress of Peoples, #76).

Is the program conflict-sensitive?  
Is the program reconciling all groups or alienating some? How does the program build bridges between divided groups and how does it take advantage of local capacities and traditions for peace-making? Does your interaction with others in the workplace and community build right relationships and therefore peace? In case of problems, what conflict resolution mechanisms are in place? If the local community disagrees with your plans, what room is there to dissent?

Collaboration with other actors, including all levels of government and social institutions, is necessary so long as there is a shared unified vision.  
Advocacy programs should be initiated with local communities so that they can lobby the appropriate layer of government for the implementation of their rights.

Is authentic partnership being fostered?  
How might the appropriate layer of government be engaged to support this program? Is a parallel structure being created?



It should be noted that the above approach is holistic – all the principles flow into one another to produce what Pope Paul VI calls “authentic development”: “Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person”<sup>6</sup>. The name given to this perspective of development by the Church is “integral human development”, ie a development of the human person which is holistic, covering all aspects of life.

In Pope Benedict XVI’s first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love)<sup>7</sup>, he delineates the characteristics of someone engaged in a social mission to the poor or vulnerable. In addition to being professionally competent, such workers must “be guided by the faith which works through love” (#33), “work in harmony with other organisations... but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples” (#34), share one’s humanity with others not just skills (“a heart which sees” #31b, sharing “heartfelt concern” #31a, requiring a “formation of the heart” #31a), be humble and be people of prayer (#36).

They must be “credible witnesses to Christ” but not engage “in what is nowadays considered proselytism” (#31c).

The extra such workers should bring is summed up in a story from the earthquake-struck zone of Bam in Iran. An old Muslim lady asked a Caritas worker for a Bible. The reply was “We can’t do that. Caritas does not proselytise but you are Muslim – why do you want one?” The old lady replied: “I want to see what inspires you people from Caritas to treat us with such love and respect.” No matter the origin of our particular humanitarian or developmental enterprise, treating people with dignity has to be at the centre of our concerns – and that is often done by sharing not just our skills, money or talent but our humanity and, in doing so, we re-discover what it means to be human. That is what is required of us by our faith as the “love of Christ urges us on” (2 Cor 5:14)

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Paul VI, The Progress of Peoples (*Populorum Progressio*), 1967, #14, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>7</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, God is Love (*Deus Caritas Est*), 2005, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).