

CHURCH MISSION, POVERTY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Catholic social teaching is part of the evangelizing mission of the universal Church. “*With her social teaching the Church seeks to proclaim the Gospel and make it present in the complex network of social relations.* It is not simply a matter of reaching out to man in society – man as the recipient of the proclamation of the Gospel – but of *enriching and permeating society itself with the Gospel.* For the Church, therefore, tending to the needs of man means that she also involves society in her missionary and salvific work. [...] Society – and with it, politics, the economy, labor, law, culture – is not simply a secular and worldly reality, and therefore outside or foreign to the message and economy of salvation. Society in fact, with all that is accomplished within it, concerns man. Society is made up of men and women, who are the primary and fundamental way for the Church” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 62).

Catholic social teaching’s values and its orientation toward the common good, which have always been the content and strength of this doctrine, call today more than ever for their concrete application to current issues of great importance and gravity. The profound crisis facing a huge segment of the world’s population today makes even more urgent the use of this resource that represents “Knowledge illuminated by faith, In friendly dialogue with all branches of knowledge” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, headings of two sections in Chapter Two, Section II).

“Economy, as the very word indicates, should be the art of achieving a fitting management of our common home, which is the world as a whole. Each meaningful economic decision made in one part of the world has

repercussions everywhere else; consequently, no government can act without regard for shared responsibility. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find local solutions for enormous global problems which overwhelm local politics with difficulties to resolve. If we really want to achieve a healthy world economy, what is needed at this juncture of history is a more efficient way of interacting which, with due regard for the sovereignty of each nation, ensures the economic well-being of all countries, not just of a few” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 206).

Pope Francis has repeatedly recalled the urgent need for “generating new models of economic progress more clearly directed to the universal common good, inclusion and integral development, the creation of labor and investment in human resources” (“Address to Participants in the International Conference of the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation,” May 13, 2016).

There are many challenges for lay Catholics involved in the world of economics to “generate new models of economic progress.” These include:

1. promoting a concept of business at the service of the common good, avoiding the unilateral logic of maximization of profit;
2. encouraging hybrid forms of business, between for-profit and non-profit, often more suitable for carrying out certain activities of production;
3. developing a new generation of entrepreneurs attentive to the issues of sustainability and the common good, in response to the great global challenge namely of employment;
4. promoting corporate welfare and family-work reconciliation solutions, also to support the birth rate in those contexts marked by the demographic crisis;
5. fostering collaboration, up to the creation of partnerships, between Christian entrepreneurs from the northern and the southern hemispheres of the world, so that solidarity takes on the face of sharing knowledge, technology transfer, support in accessing markets, and

creation of production chains that are respectful of both the human person and the environment.

It is clear now that it is necessary to rethink a growth paradigm – which, although not the only one in progress, has certainly been dominant in recent decades – a paradigm based on the idea that the market always knows how to self-regulate, that exaggerated individualism is a necessity for progress, and that the development of emerging and non-emerging countries can only take place by adopting that paradigm. Catholic social teaching, on this account, is full of concrete alternative directions. It offers a model of development based on the enhancement of the person and interpersonal relationships marked by solidarity. Above all, greater attention must be paid to the poor and excluded: “Any Church community, if it thinks it can comfortably go its own way without creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor to live with dignity and reaching out to everyone, will also risk breaking down, however much it may talk about social issues or criticize governments. It will easily drift into a spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013). If in the future we want to avoid new and more dramatic crises, it will be necessary to direct the national and international economic systems towards real development, solid and sustainable over time, abandoning the limitless consumption of the last decades and focusing instead on investments and employment.

The crisis, derived from the irreversible change that has taken place in recent decades in the relations between rich countries and the rest of the world, requires today a profound rethinking of international economic relations and a rediscovery of dynamic solidarity that, in addition to the distribution of existing resources, also concerns itself with production and concerns the North-South and East-West relations. This form of sharing is expressed through the various components of development: economic development promoted by institutions, by society, and by companies, made

up of entrepreneurs and workers; intergenerational development, which is based on sustainable social security systems and which leads to the enhancement of the family based on marriage between men and women; and social development, which promotes the cohesion of society and territories.

“The economic well-being of a country is not measured exclusively by the quantity of goods it produces but also by taking into account the manner in which they are produced and the level of equity in the distribution of income, which should allow everyone access to what is necessary for their personal development and perfection. An equitable distribution of income is to be sought on the basis of criteria not merely of commutative justice but also of social justice that is, considering, beyond the objective value of the work rendered, the human dignity of the subjects who perform it. Authentic economic well-being is pursued also by means of suitable *social policies for the redistribution of income* which, taking general conditions into account, look at merit as well as at the need of each citizen” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 303).

Today it is urgent to encourage and adopt a long-term vision that can get beyond individualistic selfishness and instead is capable of building a politics of the common good. “The principle of the universal destination of goods is an invitation to develop an economic vision inspired by moral values that permit people not to lose sight of the origin or purpose of these goods, so as to bring about a world of fairness and solidarity, in which the creation of wealth can take on a positive function” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 174). In this regard, subsidiarity, which is an enhancement of the person and each person’s autonomy and responsibility in pursuing the objectives of the common good, remains the cardinal principle of a democracy that wants to implement a balanced distribution of functions among the institutional, social, and economic subjects of the market.

An extraordinarily effective concept of development that is oriented towards the common good and the promotion of the human person can be found through the combination of subsidiarity and solidarity, as out-

lined by Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate*: “The principle of subsidiarity must remain closely linked to the principle of solidarity and vice versa, since the former without the latter gives way to social privatism, while the latter without the former gives way to paternalist social assistance that is demeaning to those in need” (n. 58). It follows that only through the interdependence of institutions, society, and the market, placed within the paradigm of subsidiarity and solidarity, can development emerge in the full sense of the term.

Taken together, all of this suggests a direction of development, including specific guidelines for concrete policy choices in the economic, social, and political fields. And it is precisely this contribution of trust and hope that the Catholic social teaching provides to today’s troubled humanity, because “the Church has no models to present; models that are real and truly effective can only arise within the framework of different historical situations, through the efforts of all those who responsibly confront concrete problems in all their social, economic, political and cultural aspects, as these interact with one another” (*Centesimus Annus*, 43).

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