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The Contribution of the Catholic Church to Work for the Third World

For more than 25 years the Catholic Church has been actively engaged in the promotion of development aid. It was from its ranks that the first calls came for a revision of the way in which aid was given, with greater emphasis on the socio-economic circumstances of the particular society and human needs. This was no overnight change of awareness but the result of a century-long process which finally became openly articulate in the 1950s. Together with the Protestant Church, the Catholic Church was the first organization to attend to need in the Third World.

The primary task of the Church is to restore the human relationship to the Transcendent-Absolute, a relationship which has been disrupted by sin. Therefore human beings have to be shown a way of access to that Transcendent-Absolute as their authentic goal. Accordingly the Church of Jesus Christ has to proclaim the "Kingdom of God" and make his will evident. Consequently the Church has to show sympathy for people and to offer resistance to evil in all social areas. This must be done in word and deed. In actual life, this means that the Church has to accept the poor, needy, oppressed and those who suffer injustice, but also the rich, because according to church teaching Christ died for everyone and thus redeemed all human beings.

The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* points out that liberation through the Gospel cannot be restricted to the economic, political, social and cultural dimension, but "must see

the whole man in all his dimensions, including his opening up to the Absolute, which is God". According to Pope John Paul II, evangelization includes concern for human development and social progress. The Catholic Church has to interest itself in these problems and has a commitment in that regard, but the spiritual must always take precedence over the material.

Very early on, indeed, Pope Pius XI defined the framework for the Church's attitude in this respect when he said that the Church had no mission to apply its authority to those areas which fell within the area of competence of the individual sciences. Accordingly, the Church can make binding pronouncements only about matters of moral law. Since morality and religious faith are closely related, it is part of the Church's task to offer the faithful criteria for appropriate moral behaviour. If the Church takes up positions regarding political decisions, its moral judgement must be clearly established. In the area of development policy it is within the competence of the Church to take up a position when human dignity is ignored. The Church is justified in this ethico-moral judgement, since human dignity and therefore human beings in their "likeness unto God" have been offended. Consequently, it is a matter ultimately of an offence against the Transcendent-Absolute itself. Therefore the Church has an office in society which it must realize, especially in the moral realm. It can fulfil its saving mission only if it comes out against social and political injustice which prevents people from obeying the divine moral law. From this the Church derives its intervention in social and political life. If, for example, people are in great need, if political conditions are such as to offend against freedom and justice, and contradict a social order which accords with human dignity, then we may derive from revelation, in the sense of a "list of prohibitions", the concrete, direct requirement to banish these inhuman circumstances.

The memorandum to UNCTAD IV shows clearly how the Christian Churches see their task in the international field. It says that the Christian Churches, whose members live both in developing and industrialized nations and bear due social responsibility, have to play an active part in this universal confrontation. In the affluent societies the Churches act as advocates for the truly impoverished and should plead for the banishment of injustice. In so doing the Church cannot represent the interests of a specific State, but has to act as the advocate of human

beings. Its foremost goal is to defend the human aspect through all ages.

Can the Gospel serve to legitimate political action on the part of the Catholic Church? Recently, indeed, this question has become all the more relevant, on the basis of Christian revelation, since attempts are constantly being made to justify resistance to the State, and thus to assert that one's own position is sacrosanct and immunize it against all criticism.

When the New Testament speaks of "authority", it does so in the sense of "God's divine authority". Every form of political authority is relativized against this background and loses any claim to absolute status. Resistance is permissible only after grave abuse, as Pope Leo XIII already confirmed in the encyclical *Immortale Dei*. This was re-asserted by Vatican II, according to which every citizen has a right to protection from a misuse of power by the State, "within the limits of the natural law and the law of the Gospel".

The Christian message must be understood and used primarily in a religious and not a political sense. This viewpoint is also that of Vatican II. To sum up, we may state that no political programmes and solutions are to be deduced from Scripture, for that would be an offence against the Christian message and the mission of the Church.

The latest survey results show that up to 80% of Catholics support the practical action of the Church in the Third World. This attitude is further supported by the fact that 46% agree with the despatch of development aid workers to lead and organize the projects. There no longer seems to be any problem of acceptance among German Catholics as far as development aid is concerned, since more than 90% indicate that reports on the Third World have made them very aware, especially of problems of poverty and hunger.

On examining the balance-sheet for conventional development aid, we find that by and large it is negative. For instance, hardly any progress has been made in the provision of a new world economic order. The conditions of world trade are so very disadvantageous to developing countries in so many fields that the development aid from the industrial nations does not even compensate for the imbalance. The idea of integrating the developing nations into the world economy has contributed very little to their development to date. It has made the Third World

countries even more dependent on the industrial nations. In fact, the "aid by trade concept" has not reduced but increased the lag in development. For instance, within a twenty-year period the non-oil-exporting countries' share of world trade was set back by 50%. The growing dependency of the developing countries is most evident from the high level of Third World countries' debts. This indebtedness does not seem to be open to resolution by the magic word "growth". The creed of liberal economists that high rates of growth will make possible a leap forward to the industrial society has not been realized as yet in the developing countries. The conventional growth models no longer seem to operate because of environmentally-conditioned and socio-politically conditioned limitations. Approaches are required which start with the most elementary factor: namely, the human being himself or herself. The Churches are called on to act in this situation, since their activity and concern are directed primarily to human beings.

The Church stresses solidarity with the poor, partnership with Third World countries, the establishment of justice in international trading, and surrender of a development policy determined solely by one's own interests.

Church action is based on a human image which sees the human being as made in God's image, and a person for that reason. Therefore development is not understood as unilateral economic development, as is the case with conventional conceptions and theories, but ultimately sees its goal as the orientation of life to the Transcendent-Absolute. To that end, social conditions have to be established which assist the development and perfection of the human person and guarantee his or her participation in social progress. The economy is only a means of realizing the individual. The production of goods is only meaningful if they serve the spiritual and ethical perfection of human beings. For the Catholic Church, a wholly materialistic form of development is equivalent to moral underdevelopment.

The Catholic Church's conception of development relies on an immaterial and spiritual notion of development with the human being as a person at its centre and service to that human being as the ultimate purpose of all development. Essentially, the Church is concerned with development as a holistic process, and to draw all human dimensions into human development. Similarly, the Church stands up for the self-realization of

nations. This means in practice that cultural and other differences are not seen as inhibiting development but as serving as the basis of development.

The Church does not speak of underdevelopment, since every individual human being is charged to develop himself or herself spiritually and ethically. Therefore there can only be people and nations that have developed differently, but not underdeveloped people and nations. The human being occupies the central position in the Church's idea of development, whereas in modernization and dependence theories the human being appears only as the object of political, economic, structural and social-psychological forces. Political scientific theories look on underdevelopment as a phenomenon to be surmounted by various strategies. Then the human being has no more than the function of an object, and appears as something determined. The Church, on the contrary, sees a person as a free being.

Cultural differences are seen not as inhibiting development, but as things to be preserved and possibly permeated with the spirit of the Gospel. The Catholic Church is open in respect of all cultures. It is not attached to any specific political, economic, social and cultural system. Consequently, the Church has to promote the self-realization of every nation, though, in accordance with the particular political and cultural traditions in question, that self-realization will take different forms.

More attention has been paid recently to the cultural factor in the development process; for it has been shown that culture is the very basis of development. A great number of development aid measures put into practice hitherto have failed because of some misunderstanding of the recipient's culture. Since this has become clear, the various organizations have been trying to produce a synthesis of culture and development.

Pope John Paul II emphasizes the major part played by culture in regard to the development process. But he always relates it to spiritual and religious elements. For the Church there can only be a unified development: that is, one which includes the religious factor.

The evangelization of cultures and the enculturation of the Gospel strengthen the authentic values of a culture, and refine and correct those that are erroneous. Its uniqueness and identity are not to be destroyed but consolidated. This has nothing to do with adaptation of the Gospel to the particular indigenous cul-

ture or *vice versa*. In this way the content of the Gospel can be expressed in the most diverse ways, without losing anything substantial. Then the particular culture experiences an inner renewal. The difference from methods practised in the past, such as accommodation, is that the particular indigenous culture does not have to surrender any supportive elements; nor does the Catholic Church. Both cultural areas enter into a fruitful relationship of mutual equilibrium.

The Catholic Church has the task of following a path which will ensure that the Third World countries do not lose their cultural identity. The Church is particularly marked out for this through its conception of evangelization together with development, since this conception is based on the Christian image of mankind and takes into account the elements of modernization theory and dependence theory in the solution of the development problem. Since transcendent elements are considered in the development policy of the Catholic Church; it offers a new route for discussion of development policies. This conception stresses the holistic view of mankind and thus avoids the reduction of human beings to individual elements. In this way the Catholic Church makes an original contribution to development. By its support for human dignity in politics, especially international relations, it points out a way to increased humanity.