



Stories of Change: Celebrating and Lamenting *Populorum Progressio*

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The image that came to mind when I read through the stories of change is – suitably for CIDSE – that of a vast and complicated tapestry, a tapestry that is not the work of one artist, but the collaborative effort of many people, in diverse situations, with varying styles. The breadth, variety and complexity of the stories of change is striking, ranging from single focus programs to multi-level broad based programmes, with time frameworks consisting of short intense periods or the action and reflection of many years. The stories also tell of dynamic partnerships between organisations in the global North and organizations in the global South.¹

The narratives told us of efforts to improve participatory democracy and challenge electoral fraud in Brazil, to defend human rights and mobilise civil society in the Democratic Republic of Congo and to work for the reintegration of former soldiers in Nicaragua. We saw the issue of land reform addressed in the stories of a Kenyan grassroots movement and church support of indigenous Guatemalan people. We heard of Catholic aid and development agencies engaged with tribal people in the Philippines, with disabled women in India, with exploited migrant workers in the Lebanon, and with the educational needs of a marginalised South African community. Poverty alleviation was addressed through empowerment of the urban poor of Zamboanga City, Philippines and through structural reform by the collaborative Jubilee Debt Campaign in which CIDSE participated. The work of the Centre of Concern and the International Gender and Trade Network told a story that highlighted the importance of bringing gender into trade negotiations, while the harrowing experiences of tortured and abused little girls were described in the story of domestic workers in India. Other stories told of the impact of the Kitovu Mobile Aids Organisation on people living with HIV/AIDS and the contribution of Uganda Martyrs University to training

¹ I note here the complexity of the terms 'North' and 'South'. A North-South divide is used to mark the development gap although the divide is not primarily defined by geography and nuances such as the difference between 'less developed countries' and 'least economically developed countries' need to be acknowledged.

healthcare managers. The story of the changes in the life of a Pakistani widow, who was made homeless by the 2005 earthquake, through the provision of a ‘transitional shelter’, linked what might traditionally be considered as relief work to the broader questions of human flourishing e.g. security, family cohesion and respectability. The role of a community radio project in giving leadership in defence of the environment and in advocacy for human rights was told in the Ecuadorian story of *Radio Sucumbíos*.

These stories of change weave a rich and complex tapestry that is representative of the work of Catholic aid, development, justice and peace organizations worldwide. Across these stories of change from different cultures and contexts weave the common threads of the Gospel inspired, ecclesially shaped and professionally informed body that we call Catholic social teaching. We try to teach students of theology that the principles of Catholic social teaching are interconnected, but nothing portrays that interconnectedness as much as the threads that weave through and across these stories. Although I would have liked, for my slide, an image of a tapestry that was a little more raggedy and unfinished ...



We live in a time of enormous and rapid change on so many levels; yet, paradoxically, the speed of change in the contemporary world has fostered among many people either a sense of apathy that such changes are simply inevitable and beyond our control or, among those who do not benefit from the changes, a sense of powerlessness. So, the fact that these stories witness to the capacity for voluntary and creative change in the midst of the seemingly unstoppable change that characterises

our time is hugely important. They are marked by a creative tension between the denunciation of injustice and the annunciation of alternatives, a tension that is generative of change.

I do not embrace many of the suppositions of postmodern philosophy and am particularly concerned about the danger of merely perspectival approaches to ethics, but one of the insights of Jean-François Lyotard is worth reflecting upon: ‘In our postmodern world the grand narrative of the development of the human race, in the manner of Hegel or Marx, is no longer possible, only little narratives can now be told, petit récits, which make temporary and local sense of events.’²

I disagree with Lyotard’s conclusion about grand narratives for, on a global scale, as the British academic Nicholas Boyle observes, ‘history is just beginning, for the struggle to establish a political order corresponding to the economic has a long way to go and on the journey the Catholic Church has to play ...a prominent role’.³ But the discourse about the struggle to establish a just political, economic and social order has generally overlooked the little narratives, the local headlines, the voices of victims and the small victories of groups working for change. However while Lyotard would say that these little narratives merely make ‘temporary and local sense of events’, we could say that the stories of change – these little narratives of Catholic social teaching and development – are rooted stories of response to the signs of the times in particular places that also have something to teach the universal Church.

The use of these stories, emerging from a variety of cultural and geographic contexts, exemplifies the inductive methodology and historical consciousness that marks the best of Catholic social thought⁴ since the Second Vatican Council; they are not simply stories about the deductive ‘application’ of Catholic social teaching. The methodology and content of this CIDSE conference have something to teach us about the formation of Catholic social teaching at the level of the local churches, a concern that is at the heart of Paul VI’s apostolic letter *Octogesima Adveniens*.⁵ It could be suggested that both the vision of authentic development of *Populorum Progressio* and the more inductive, historically conscious methodology espoused by *Octogesima Adveniens* are alive in this CIDSE conference.

² *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 37.

³ *Who Are We Now? Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998, 92.

⁴ I use the term ‘Catholic social thought’ to refer both to the work of Catholic thinkers and groups who address the social issues of their time from a faith perspective and to the body of ‘Catholic social teaching’ i.e. documents issued by those who hold official teaching positions in the Church based on their membership in the episcopal college.

⁵ Apostolic letter of Paul VI to Cardinal Maurice Roy, president of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace, May 14th, 1971, issued to commemorate the 80th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*.

A Lamentation and a Celebration of *Populorum Progressio*

I realise that many of you have been reflecting throughout this anniversary year on the context, content and impact of what is sometimes described as our ‘Magna Carta’ of development documents, *Populorum Progressio*. Not wanting to repeat what you already know, I just want to wonder how Pope Paul VI might respond if he were here at this conference. I think Paul would be happy to see *Populorum Progressio* engaged with in such a dynamic way at this conference, but also saddened at the continuing relevance of the following insights:

- Development remains a ‘new’ name for peace
- The world is still ‘sick’ due to the unproductive monopolization of resources by a few (66)
- The scandal of glaring inequality and the widening gap between rich and poor
- The abuses of capitalism do not serve the common good
- Continuing inequity in trade relations
- ‘At stake is the survival of so many innocent children, and for so many families overcome by misery, the access to conditions fit for human beings, at stake are the peace of the world and the future of civilization. It is a time for all men and all peoples to face up to their responsibilities.’ (80)
- Solidarity is a duty and such solidarity must be practical

While he would lament the enduring relevance of these words of *Populorum Progressio*, I think Paul VI would celebrate the enduring relevance of his notion of ‘integral human development’ and would rejoice in the way that concept has been expanded. He would be happy that his words about seeking, knowing and having more in order to *be* more were inspiring the actions of educators and radio broadcasters, of indigenous peoples and Catholic research and advocacy groups.

He might be surprised to see ‘gender’ emerge as a recurring motif in the definition of poverty and in the suggestions for its essential consideration in the projects that constitute the work of Catholic social justice work worldwide.

I want to note here how strongly the gender component came through in the stories of change, a profound lesson when some in the global North say that the insights of feminism are no longer necessary and some in the global South continue to see feminism only as a middle class Northern issue being foisted upon other cultures and societies. While the issue of gender was woven throughout most of the stories, the presentation of the story from the Centre of Concern and the International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN) brought to light the ambiguity of the specific

relationship between gender justice and Catholic social teaching. Many members of the IGTN drew their inspiration from the principles and vision of Catholic social teaching but did not experience themselves as recognised by the Church as being rooted in that tradition. I would suggest that this is probably due to their heavy reliance on feminist economic and political theory. Without denying that the word ‘feminism’ is a bruised word and that not all feminist theory is compatible with Catholic social teaching, the strength and complexity of the gender motif across the stories of change challenge all those who overlook gender as an essential component in matters of justice, peace and development.

While Paul VI recognised that each human being is responsible for their own fulfilment, as they are for their salvation (15), the tendency in *Populorum Progressio* was to appeal to the altruism of the rich and powerful, seeking that they change their values and institutional arrangements to respond to the needs of the developing world. I think Paul would rejoice that the stories of change witness to efforts to also empower people to be agents of their own fulfilment and to seek viable alternative institutional arrangements that better serve human development.

It has been suggested that the approach to justice and development in *Populorum Progressio* lies somewhere between development theory and a liberationist view. In many ways, the stories that we have listened to also witness to both the incremental approach of development theory and the more radical – i.e. addressing injustice from the root – approach of liberation theology and philosophy. The former can be more engaged with *realpolitik*, while liberation theology has been slow – post 1989 – to develop its economic analysis in the face of globalisation.

That tension between development and liberation challenges me as a theologian to reflect on what theology guides our search for authentic human development in the contemporary world and that perhaps there is a need for a theology of human flourishing that brings together the incremental change of development work and the more radical rooting out of sources of injustice that characterises the methodology of liberation theology.

North – South Partnership: Reciprocity of Critique

My own life story straddles between the global North and the global South, so I offer these reflections as a theologian whose own life and perspective has been profoundly affected by spending most of my working life thus far in the developing world. I offer these reflections also as someone who knows first hand something of the successes and failures that efforts at change and development involve. I also know what it is to be part of a small, local NGO dealing with issues of funding and staff, of policy and accountability, of lack of resources and the dreadful tedium of

funding applications. I know a little of the stresses and strains that mark the workaday world of those working for justice and development.

Bishop Macram Gassis of the Sudan was interviewed on Irish radio recently and he had very strong words for people in the North about the importance of not discrediting local NGOs in the South.⁶ He stressed that we, in the North, should be careful not to portray these local NGOs as corrupt or incompetent. Northern agencies need to take this caution very seriously, but I would also add that where corruption exists in either member of a North-South partnership it must be challenged by both partners. Cultural values cannot be invoked to justify corrupt or exclusionary practices. If incompetence exists, we need to develop local competence and put energy into capacity building.⁷

Aid and development organizations are often criticized for being better at gathering the information they think they need rather than helping poor people to acquire the information *they* need in order to participate in discussion and influence the process of aid. These stories of change are fine examples of genuine efforts to maximize participation and enable those who are poor to shape the process that shapes their lives.

These stories of change witness to the potentiality of real partnership, a partnership of equals where there may financial inequality on the base of donor and receiver status. This does not, however, negate the fundamental human and Christian equality that persists despite differences in resources and even in skills. But as we see from the stories of change – and perhaps we do not see sufficient of this acknowledged in the stories – this kind of equality amid difference needs gentle negotiation. What is called for is reciprocity of critique in our relationships, and such reciprocity requires equal measures of respect, courage and sensitivity.

What ‘added value’ does Catholic Social Teaching bring to our development work?

This was one of the key questions raised in the preparatory document for this conference. What ‘added value’ does Catholic social teaching bring to our development work? What difference does Christian faith make? The Methodist theologian Stephen Plant contends that ‘in spite of half a century of post-war relief and development work – and two millennia of charitable service – the

⁶ Interview on ‘This Week’, RTÉ, Radio I, 21st October, 2007. I was also struck by Bishop Gassis’ use of the term ‘traumatized’ to describe the people of the Sudan and the consequent need for ‘healing’ which will require considerable financial aid. His use of the term ‘healing’ in the context of the conflict in the Sudan, with its dreadful human cost rooted in an ecological crisis, was a clear example of an appeal for integral development that we would now understand to have an environmental dimension.

⁷ In countries where government wages are very low, Catholic agencies should assess their involvement in the draining of the best and brightest from their needed role in government to the well-paid NGO sector.

churches and their agencies are still *theologically* unsure of *why* they do *what* they do'.⁸ The results of this uncertainty, Plant suggests, are the dislocation of the development work of Christian organizations from the life and mission of the church and the lack of a discernible impact by theology on the policies and practices of such organizations.

I would not agree with Plant's conclusion that church based aid and development agencies are completely '*theologically* unsure of *why* they do *what* they do' – indeed this conference attests to a theological vision flowing from Scripture and

Catholic social teaching – but we do see evidence of the dislocation of development work from the life of the Church and the need for greater engagement between theology and development discourse. Such dislocation is not primarily the fault of Catholic development agencies, for Catholics generally do not take seriously enough the fact that we have a dynamic body of social teaching which is intrinsic to the doctrine of our church. By reflecting on the 'added value' of Catholic social teaching, are we implying that religion provides a *superior* motivation for relief and development? No, the question about the added value of this social teaching is not one of a superior motivation, but one of *identity*. To briefly raise this question of identity I turn to the metaphor of language.

What language do you dream in?

I remember one of the sisters in my community in Samoa coming into breakfast excitedly because she had been dreaming during the night in the Samoan language – and for a woman from County Kilkenny in Ireland that was quite a cultural and affective leap! We usually dream in our mother tongue. I want to use this idea of the language that we dream in as a metaphor for reflecting on some of the important issues that this conference raises. In terms of their reference to Catholic social teaching the stories of change could be divided into three groups:

- Those which made explicit and direct reference to Catholic Social teaching
- Those which took a more implicit approach to Catholic social teaching
- Those stories in which a reference to Catholic social teaching seemed to be absent⁹

What language do you dream of justice in?

Our mother tongue, as Catholic aid and development agencies, is the gospel inspired, ecclesially shaped and professionally informed language of catholic social teaching, drawing as it does both

⁸ 'Does faith matter in development?', <http://www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/vhi/fis/dfmid.doc>

⁹ I am simply noting the presence (implicit or explicit) or absence of reference to Catholic social teaching in the Stories of Change as presented at this conference.

from the classical philosophical – albeit Western – tradition of justice and from the Biblical language and images of justice. We dream:

Of images of widows and orphans
 Of cries of the poor
 Of slavery and Exodus
 Of exile and return from exile
 Of good news for the poor, for prisoners and the oppressed
 Of eating with lepers and sinners and prostitutes
 Of turning toward Jerusalem despite threats of possible violence and in fidelity to a sense of mission
 Of a Risen and wounded Saviour who speaks words of peace in the midst of fear

This is the rich and evocative language that is our first language of justice.

But we also need to be articulate in other languages of justice: development theory, economics and politics, human rights and ecological concern. The question regarding which language we speak, of what difference the Gospel and Catholic social teaching make to the discourse and practice of development work, is part of the larger question about what is specific about Christian ethics. The Catholic Natural law tradition could run the risk of muting the distinctively Christian dimension of our justice language. The more Protestant approach could tend to dichotomize faith-based development and the work of secular agencies and organizations.

While our discourse about justice remains primarily grounded in Scripture and Catholic social teaching, it is essential that we seek fluency in the many ways human beings articulate concerns about justice and in times of crisis a form of ‘ethical Esperanto’ may be necessary.¹⁰

The challenge for the Catholic aid and development agency – a challenge that is well met by many agencies here¹¹ – is to be multilingual in the languages of justice and development. It is important – indeed essential – to be able to speak about justice across the boundaries of religion and culture. It is important to have people trained in the technical language of economics and politics, of agriculture and sustainability. But we also need to keep in touch with what is, in fact, our mother tongue in the area of justice.

¹⁰ Understanding Esperanto as a ‘neutral’ constructed language that is not genealogically related to any ethnic language.

¹¹ I note here the Lenten campaign of the Irish agency *Trocaire* as a good example of the multilingual approach that is grounded in its mother tongue.

I don't generally dream of the capabilities approach of Sen and Nussbaum, of UNDP reports, theories of globalization and stages of development, although my discourse about justice is informed by these. I dream of justice in terms of a banquet to which all are welcome and my moral imagination is shaped by the ethical indignation of Leo XIII in the face of the miserable conditions of the poor of the Industrial Revolution.

Such is the way I dream of justice and then try to articulate that dream in a coherent, contemporary, ecumenical and interdisciplinary language of justice.

Perhaps you could take one question back to your own organizations as you reflect upon *Populorum Progressio* and the 'added value' of Catholic social teaching in development work: What language do you dream of justice in?

The gap between our proclaimed ethic and our operative ethic?

This fortieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio* and of the foundation of CIDSE is also an opportunity to assess our practice of development work and our efforts at global partnership by reflecting on the gap that exists between our proclaimed ethic and our operative ethic – as church, as Catholic organizations and as individuals.

While there are many and significant differences between the historical experience of the church in the global North and the church in the global South – and indeed differences in the historical experiences of local churches within the North and between local churches in the South – nonetheless it is fair to suggest that our Catholic church has entered this millennium somewhat bruised by what has been exposed about the gap between our proclaimed ethic and our operative ethic, be that in the dreadful saga of child abuse or the issue of church corruption in relation to funding and aid, a bruising that is most evident in a crisis of trust.

Catholic aid and development agencies that work for justice and peace, that witness to a special concern for the poor and vulnerable, are uniquely poised to heal some of that bruised trust. However it is important that the critique of the gap that exists between the proclaimed and operative ethic of the wider Church be accompanied by an examination of that gap as it potentially and actually exists in our work as Catholic aid and development agencies. A celebration of *Populorum Progressio* needs also to be marked by an honest assessment of what we do and how we do it, of the gap between our proclaimed ethic as members and partners of CIDSE and our operative ethic. Such an assessment raises consciousness and such consciousness is the first step to bridging that gap between the ethic proclaimed by our organizations and our actual practice.

As individuals, we too need to be mindful of the gap as it exists between the ethic we proclaim as practitioners of justice and development and our operative ethic. We are fragile people, in a flawed church, working in a wounded world but this is where God's grace is operative, this is where we are called to witness to the Gospel of peace and justice. Perhaps the caution of Stanley Hauerwas is well placed here – the Christian church does not *have* a social ethic but rather *is* a social ethic.¹² We do not simply *have* a body of Catholic social teaching – we *are* that body.

Deus Caritas Est

Populorum Progressio remains the most rounded statement on Integral Development in Catholic social teaching. Its teaching was celebrated, reaffirmed and expanded upon by Pope John Paul II in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*;¹³ these two documents remain the key texts of Catholic social teaching on the matter of development. I was asked to keep three documents in mind when preparing a response for this conference.

The third suggested document was *Deus Caritas Est*. It is addressed to Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and all the Lay Faithful – not to all men and women of goodwill, as *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* were.

There is much that can be said about this first encyclical, about the nature of the relationship between charity and justice, about Benedict's reminder that the just ordering of society is the central responsibility of politics, indeed about whether this encyclical can be properly considered part of the corpus of Catholic social teaching. We await eagerly Pope Benedict's new encyclical which, it is expected, will condemn tax evasion, which reduces the tax revenues that benefit society as a whole, as socially unjust. There was a strong reaction from some members of the European and American business community to Pope Paul VI's criticism of 'profit as the key motive for economic progress, competition as the supreme law of economics' and of the perception of an absolute right to private ownership of the means of production, a right devoid of social obligation (*Populorum Progressio*, 26). This resulted in some business people flying to Rome to clarify whether the pope was referring to all forms of capitalism or just to some forms, a clarification sought due to concern for how the encyclical would be received in the developing world,

¹² See *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981. It is important to note here that Hauerwas would not be sympathetic to the multilingual approach of Catholic aid and development agencies. For Hauerwas, the first word Christians have to say about justice is 'Church'. The Church does not have a social ethic; the Church is a social ethic whose agenda regarding justice and peace should not be set by the world. Nonetheless Hauerwas' particular view of Christian ethics and ecclesiology does offer an important critique of our understanding of the relationship between faith and justice/development.

¹³ Written to mark the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, 30th December, 1987.

particularly in Latin America.¹⁴ One can only guess what the response will be to any denunciation of socially unjust tax havens and offshore accounts in a future encyclical!

While *Deus Caritas Est* does seem to lack the sense of urgency and the passionate ethical indignation that marks many of the documents of Catholic social teaching, and it may, perhaps, mark a continuity with the more oppositional view of modernity found in the later writings of his predecessor John Paul II, it is clear that Pope Benedict intended to address ‘the distinctiveness of the Church’s charitable activity’ (31) and to speak to ‘those responsible for the Church’s charitable activity’ (32-39). Thus I reflected on what insight and challenge could be gleaned from *Deus Caritas Est* for our work in the service of justice, peace and development:

(i) The relationship between love and bearing credible witness. (31)

It is our responsibility as Catholic aid and development agencies – what Benedict refers to as ‘the Church’s charitable organisations’ – to reinforce the importance of love so that ‘by our words, silence, example’ we ‘may be credible witnesses to Christ’.

While there will be some reluctance to fully endorse the statement that ‘the personnel of every Catholic charitable organisation wants to work with the Church and therefore with the Bishop, so that the Love of God can spread throughout the world’ (33), it is clear from these stories of change that the personnel engaged in the work of Catholic aid and development agencies are not motivated by merely professional interest in the people with whom they work, but have a sense of this relationship between love and bearing credible witness.

(ii) Activity without love is insufficient

The reminder of the insufficiency of action without love is not a comparison with the secular humanitarian agencies or a suggestion that those who work for justice on purely humanitarian grounds are deficient in love. We live, as Karl Rahner reminds us, in a world that is graced, where God’s love is operative in all genuine efforts to uphold human dignity and freedom. *Deus Caritas Est* offers a reminder that for us, as Christians, our loving is a response to the God who is Love and made us, as *Imago Dei*, to love and be loved.

(iii) In helping others we ourselves receive help (35)

There is a receptivity involved in our giving of ourselves to those who suffer; we receive from those we engage with in our work for justice. This, perhaps, could be developed in reference to our

¹⁴ See ‘Businessmen Study Encyclical’, *The Tablet* 221, July 8, 1967, 760.

work with the poor and be brought out more explicitly in our stories of change that involve the preferential option for the poor. What is the nature of this receptivity? What change has been brought about within ourselves as a result of working with the poor? How have we been helped by helping others?

(iv) Discouragement due to the burden of need and our own limitations (35)

The enormity of the need and complexity of the problems faced by Catholic aid and development organizations, together with a painful awareness of our personal and corporate limitations, can lead to profound discouragement. Benedict offers a reminder that only when we see ourselves as instruments in the hands of God can we be freed from presuming that we alone are responsible for building a better world.

Only by seeing ourselves as instruments in the hands of the God of Justice and Peace can we be free from either an ideology that believes we can solve all problems or an apathy that allows no faith in change at all.

In his book, *The Selfish Altruist: Relief Work in Famine and War*, Tony Vaux who worked for almost 30 years for Oxfam, reflects on his experience of relief work in the midst of some of the most traumatic situations of famine and war in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Vaux acknowledges the inadequacy of a secular eschatology, especially the unlimitedness and 'superficial optimism' of the concept of humanitarian concern. 'The aid worker is condemned to live with dissatisfaction and uneasiness.'¹⁵ It is clear that a secular eschatology whose credo consists in the belief that human efforts alone can realize a new and just world, is both inadequate and, for those engaged in working in the areas of justice, peace and development, ultimately a heavy burden.

The stories of change at this conference also tell of costly risks and dangers, of violence, imprisonment and loss of life. In the stark words of the story of *Radio Sucumbios*: 'Everything came at a price'. All the stories point to some failure and discouragement as part of the journey toward change. I learned a lot about the kind of discouragement involved in working for justice and peace when we, as Holy Faith Sisters, were establishing our project to work with children who live and/or work on the streets of Port of Spain. Achieving the trust of these children, some of whom were wild in their behaviour due to years of living on the streets, was a long and difficult process, one that led us into an underworld that we were scarcely aware of and the exposure of

¹⁵ London/Sterling VA: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2001. Vaux, in a committed 'insider's' critique of the whole basis of developmental aid, explores the relationship between altruism and power. He also discusses both the dangers of a strictly human rights approach to aid and the worrying ascendancy of Western governments over aid agencies.

which often brought us into conflict with the authorities. Small failures – indeed some that seemed major at the time – littered the way to the establishment of the project.

I also remember being in the Haitian settlements in Santo Domingo, places with a level of poverty lower than the barrios of the indigenous poor of Santo Domingo and being overwhelmed by the depth of the poverty I saw there. A line from a poem by the Caribbean poet, Lorna Goodison, came to mind:

The world tribe of the dispossessed
Outside the halls of plenty
Looking in¹⁶

When dealing with the brutality of war, when faced with seeming impotence in the face of humanitarian disasters large and small, when facing this ‘world tribe of the dispossessed’ it is easy to lose heart and it is clear that a purely secular eschatology will not ultimately sustain.

(v) ‘Formation of the Heart’ to accompany professional training (31)

Pope Benedict wishes ‘to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work’ (37). Without denying the legitimate autonomy of the secular, agencies from the global North can learn from many of our Southern partners – where the lines between the sacred and the secular are not always so rigidly drawn – about the place of prayer and spirituality in development work.

However Benedict’s concerns are accompanied neither by elucidation of what the pope understands as this ‘activism’ nor by any exposition of how that ‘growing secularism’ is manifest in Catholic agencies. Perhaps it is best to read this concern together with the earlier caution about both the importance *and* the insufficiency of professional competence. Benedict suggests that ‘charity workers’ – a term many members of Catholic development organizations may not accept as a description of their role – need ‘formation of the heart’ to accompany professional training (31). It is this formation of the heart which will deepen our own humanity so that we can respond to the humanity of others in ‘heartfelt concern’. It could be suggested, of course, that not all professionalism of development automatically results in growing secularism, for such professionalism enables us to love more responsibly, constructively and in a more transformative way. However the call to accompany essential professional training with some sort of ‘formation of

¹⁶ ‘This is a Hymn’ from the collection *Heartease*, London/Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1988.

the heart' should be heeded by Catholic organizations especially as we try to understand the relationship between Catholic social teaching and our development work.

(vi) Models of social charity

Benedict concludes with a reflection on men and women who 'stand out as lasting models of social charity for all people of good will'. (41) He includes among these Mother Teresa of Calcutta to whom he referred earlier.

'The saints – consider the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta – constantly renewed their capacity for love of neighbour from their renewed encounter with the Eucharistic Lord, and conversely this encounter acquired its realism and depth in their service to others.' (29)

It is with hesitation that I state that I have difficulties with the approach Mother Teresa took in some areas of justice, aid, medicine and development. I acknowledge that her personal encounter with the most despised and neglected of our world is deeply moving and for many – both within and without the Church – she remains a profound model of holiness. Benedict refers to her in the context of her capacity for love and identifies her – and others – as 'lasting models of social charity for all people of good will'. The recent biography of Mother Teresa challenges the accepted hagiography but also gives us a greater insight into the profundity of her holiness and the true cost of her capacity for love. *Mother Teresa: Come be my light* reveals a woman who loved even as she experienced loneliness, darkness and doubt. My former colleague in Trinidad, Fr. Henry Charles, in an insightful reflection on this recent publication suggests: 'The real paradox, perhaps, one to be marvelled at, not perplexed over, is that Mother Teresa should have persisted in radiating faith and love while suffering so deeply from an absence of consolation.'¹⁷

To move from justice to love may seem like taking the 'softer' option but these recent insights into the inner turmoil of someone who did embrace those most despised in our world, offer us a model of a hard won capacity for love, one that may speak to us in the difficulties we have in facing the brokenness of persons and places that we meet in our work for justice, peace and development.

The Preferential Option for the Poor

I want to finish by addressing the preferential option for the poor as one of the threads of Catholic social teaching that emerged clearly across the entire fabric of the stories of change. From the decision in the Prelature of Infanta, Philippines, to search out the 'poorest of the poor' to the Kenyan reflections on the 'risks and benefits, threats and hopes' involved in making an option for

¹⁷ 'The long night of Mother Teresa', *Catholic News*, Trinidad, October 21st, 2007.

the poor, this option is woven in different ways throughout all of the stories. Although recognised as a principle of Catholic social teaching, the idea of the preferential option for the poor remains a contested term, a theological concept that is probably the most controversial since the Reformation cry 'Salvation through faith alone'. It elicits strong responses both in terms of commitment and critique, but it has also been vulnerable to absorption that uses the term 'option for the poor' in a superficial way or dilutes its more critical components.

Sr. Lizy Joseph began our conference reflection on the stories of change by describing the work of the National Domestic Workers Movement in India. It is a story of change that deals with issues of child labour, migration and human trafficking, a story that demonstrates a great understanding of the complexity of the relationship between Catholic social teaching and development work.

Several references were made to the perceived status of domestic workers as 'non-persons', here reflecting the language of liberation theology. The option for the poor being made in contemporary India was seen as firmly rooted in the Scriptures and in Catholic social teaching. Sr. Lily then clearly rooted herself in the story, a reminder that the option for the poor is not simply to take up the cause of the poor as a special concern or project in our work but that it is something that challenges where and how we stand upon issues of justice, peace and development.

The stories of change coming from CIDSE and our Southern partner organizations challenge us to reflect on and seek a deeper understanding of the complexity of poverty. Poverty is the great problem of our world, for the poor are the majority of humanity. We see that poverty has many faces and poverty affects people differently. The condition of poverty can be transitory or permanent; in its persistent form, leading to the premature death of the poor, it constitutes institutional violence

The economist Amartya Sen reminds us that poverty can be understood as 'capability deprivation', not simply lowness of income, and development of human capabilities is the real goal of welfare economics.¹⁸ But poverty, particularly the poverty of children, not only denies their flourishing as individuals but also denies the human community the gifts of those who never reach their potential. Thus poverty affects not only the individual whose capabilities are denied, but also communities and societies who are impoverished by the loss of those who never reach their potential.

These stories of change teach us that poverty is not just about vulnerabilities and deficiencies. The poor often witness to a graceful resilience that seems almost miraculous to those of us whose life

¹⁸ *Development as Freedom*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, Chapter 4: 'Poverty as Capability Deprivation', 87-110. Sen is credited with helping move the development paradigm from one narrowly focused on economic growth to one focusing on human flourishing and well-being.

experience is more privileged than peripheral. The energy to face adversity with creativity and the capacity to celebrate and hope in the midst of adversity are also part of the reality of the poor. If I would offer one critique or challenge to the way the preferential option for the poor was discussed in the groups, it would be to take seriously the dimension of liberation theology which speaks of the 'epistemological privilege of the poor'. How have we been 'evangelized' by working with the poor? As we have sought to accompany them in the work of justice and development, how have we been enriched?

Ultimately, the notion of a preferential option has its basis in a failure of justice. To focus on the option for the poor as an option for justice is also to suggest that such a preferential option offers a fundamental moral norm for assessing situations where conflict between claims has to be faced.

Three normative ethical standards for our efforts to implement human rights in terms of justice are offered in an analysis by David Hollenbach, especially where different rights claims can be in conflict:

- (i) the needs of the poor take priority over the wants of the rich
- (ii) the freedom of the dominated takes priority over the liberty of the powerful
- (iii) the participation of the marginalised takes priority over the preservation of an order which excludes them.¹⁹

These three normative ethical standards offer an insightful method for assessment of our decisions and priorities on the ground. The stories of change indicate that methodologies which incorporate these ethical priorities are being used in the work of Catholic aid and development agencies throughout the world as they try to make the option for the poor a reality in very different and diverse ways. The stories of change witness to concrete efforts to make the needs of the poor a priority over the wants of the rich, to give the freedom of the dominated priority over the liberty of the powerful and to give priority to the participation of the marginalised over the preservation of an order which excludes them.

Conclusion

We move forward from this CIDSE conference with an awareness that the threads of our distinct organizations and projects are part of this rich and complex tapestry of Catholic aid, development, justice and peace work throughout the world, a tapestry whose shades and hues reflect the best of

¹⁹ *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition*, New York: Paulist Press, 1979, 203-207.

secular theory and the insights of Catholic social teaching. We commit ourselves to greater fluency in our mother tongue and to being multilingual in the languages of justice and development.

We are encouraged by the hearing of stories and the inclusion of voices that are often overlooked in the larger discourse of justice. We find hope in their witness to the capacity for voluntary and creative change in the midst of the seemingly unstoppable change that characterises our time of globalisation. We celebrate the enduring relevance of the vision of integral human development found in *Populorum Progressio* and lament the poverty and injustice that persists forty years later. May this celebration and lamentation sustain us as we work together for global justice.

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