

VAIHARAI

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VAIHARAI

Social Teaching of the Catholic Church

From Editor's Desk

The social teaching of the Catholic Church is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living a life of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. It relates to what Jesus taught in the Gospels: justice, equality, mercy, love, peace and so on. It focuses on the concept that we are not alone. Its teaching is radical compared to the teachings of other religions in the world. It gives relevant teachings according to the need of the hour for the progress of the entire humanity and it calls us to ask what we can do or plan to bring God's reign closer to our humanity at large.

The Church's social teaching in the modern period dates back to 1891, when Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical letter, *On the Conditions of Labour (Rerum Novarum)*. The Pope spoke out against the inhuman conditions which were the normal plight of working class in industrial societies. He recognized that the three key factors underlying the economic life are workers, productive property and the state. He also indicated that their just and equitable interrelationship is the crucial issue of Catholic social teaching. Because of the principles which set forth to guide in the formation of a just society, this document has become known as the *Magna Carta* for a humane economic and social order. After 124 years of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Francis published the encyclical letter *Praise be to You (Laudato Si)*. Thus, for the past 125 years the social teaching of the Catholic Church has made a great impact on the development of the society. Thanks be to God.

In 1931, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Pius XI published the social encyclical, *The Reconstruction of the Social Order (Quadragesimo Anno)*. Writing in the midst of a severe, worldwide economic depression, Pius XI addressed the issue of social injustice and called for reconstruction of the social order. He also stressed the social responsibilities of private property and the rights of working people.

Thirty years after Pius XI's letter, Pope John XXIII wrote two major social encyclicals on the central issues of his day, *Mother and Teacher (Mater et Magistra, 1961)* and *Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris, 1963)*. Pope John set forth a number of principles to guide both Christians and policy makers in addressing the gap between rich and poor nations and threat to world peace. He emphasized that the growing interdependence among nations in a world community called for an effective world government which would look to the rights of the individual human person and promote the universal common good.

When Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council in October 1962, he opened the windows of the Church to the fresh air of the modern world. This Twenty-first Ecumenical Council was the first to reflect a truly world Church. In many respects, Vatican II represented the end of one era and the beginning of a new era. The enthusiasm and energies of the age of enlightenment had been spent. The philosophical movement of the eighteenth century, marked by a rejection of traditional social, religious and political ideas and an emphasis on rationalism, had culminated in the Holocaust in Europe and in a world sharply divided. These events had dashed hopes that secular society, based on human reason severed from religious faith, would lead to unending progress. Instead a misguided rationalism had unleashed forces which threatened to destroy the world. The Church had turned inward in reaction to a rationalistic age which demeaned religious

belief. Religion, more and more defined as a “private” affair between the individual and God, was relegated to a marginal role in secular society. At the same time, the Church channeled its energies outwardly to evangelize the “mission lands” of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. During Vat II, the council leaders rejected that marginal role in society as inconsistent with the unique religious mission which Christ had giving to his Church. They disclaimed for the Church any unique and proper mission in the political, economic, or social order. But in 1965 in *The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, they affirmed that specifically religious mission of the Church did give it “a function, a light, and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law. As a matter of fact, when circumstances of time and place create the need, it can and indeed should initiate activities on behalf of all the people” (no.42). Yet the Council, in relating the Church to the wider society, did caution against any disrespect shown toward other views which were religiously founded. This was the message of the great statement *On Religious Freedom (Dignitatis Humanae, 1965)*, a statement strongly influenced by the experience of the Church in United States.

In 1967, Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *The Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)* responded to the cries of the world’s poor and hungry and addressed the structural dimensional of global injustice. He appealed to both rich and poor nations to work together in a spirit of solidarity to establish an order of justice. In 1971, Paul VI wrote an apostolic letter *A Call to Action (Octogesimo Adveniens)* on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of *On the Conditions of Labor (Rerum Novarum)*. Here Paul VI acknowledged the difficulties inherent in establishing a just social order and pointed out to the role of local Christian communities in meeting this responsibility.

Also in 1971, representatives of the world bishops gathered in a Synod in Rome and prepared the statement *Justice in the World*. In this document, the bishops identified the hopes of people for a better world. Then, in 1975 Pope Paul VI advanced the social teaching of the Church further in his *Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*. He emphasized that preaching the Gospel would be incomplete if it did not take into account human rights and themes of family life, life in society, peace, justice, and development. Liberation-in both its spiritual and its temporal senses-must be proclaimed. The plan of redemption includes combating injustice. In 1981, Pope John Paul II's important social teaching came in on *Human Work (Laborum Exercens)*. "The priority of labour over capital" was enunciated as central to the just society. The Pope criticized an "economism" which would reduce humans to mere instruments of production. In 1988, Pope John Paul II in *The Social Concerns of the Church (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis)*, pushed the link between peace and justice further by emphasizing the plight of Third World development in terms of harmful influence of superpower confrontation. He strongly criticized the desire for profit and the thirst for power, calling them "structures of sin". The Pope offered a solution in the direction of a politics of solidarity. In 1991, the next Papal encyclical by John Paul II, *One Hundred Years (Centesimus Annus)*, articulated a "right top progress" which stated that all people had the right to acquire and develop the skills and technology which would enable them to participate in the contemporary economy. The Pope stated that the stronger nations had a duty to allow the weaker nations to assume their rightful place in the world.

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate)* introduced the idea of the need for a strong "World Political Authority" to deal with humanity's most pressing challenges and problems. The encyclical is concerned with problems of global development

and progress towards the common good, arguing that both Love and Truth are essential elements of an effective response.

In 2013, the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)* touched on the obligations Christians have to the poor and the duty to establish and maintain just economic, political, and legal orders. The Pope also said that the world “can no longer trust in the unseen forces and invisible hand of the market” and called for action beyond a simple welfare mentality that attacks the structural causes of inequality. In 2015, his encyclical *Praise be to you (Laudato Si)* was published and the encyclical has a subtitle “On Care For Our Common Home”. The Pope critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, laments environmental degradation and global warming, and calls people of the world to take “swift and unified global action”. The encyclical states that developed nations are morally obliged to assist developing nations in combating the climate change crisis. Linking the issue of poverty, he insists that the world must “hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”.

The key principles of the above Catholic social teachings can be enumerated in 10 headings: (1) Human Dignity (2) Community and Common Good (3) Rights and Responsibilities (4) Option for the Poor and the Vulnerable (5) Participation (6) Dignity of Work and Rights of the Workers (7) Stewardship of Creation (8) Solidarity (9) Role of Government (10) Promotion of Peace. Based on these principles we present here in this issue five relevant topics for our theological reflections.

Dr Sahayaraj Stanley succinctly brings out the nuances of Corporate Social Responsibility and the Catholic Social Teachings of the Church. The author of this article develops that the world created by God is good. The human person the crown of creation is called to live joyfully and peacefully with all created beings. Corporations create wealth and job opportunities as

human persons we work in companies. We demand a just wage for our hard work. But the whole profit is taken away by the corporate. The Catholic social teachings and its economic views are expressed by various Papal encyclicals. Following the footsteps of Jesus we must have greater awareness of money and its managements.

In the topic on Catholic Social Teaching on Media, Dr A. Stephen S.J clearly elucidates the relationship between media and the Church. Though the Church uses media for evangelization, it addresses various ethical issues namely equality, freedom, justice and love. In fact, the Church cannot keep its fingers crossed when there is so much of limitations to the freedom of expression.

Dr X. D. Selvaraj in his article on Option for the Poor and Vulnerable in the light of social teaching of the Church gives the biblical basis and from the social teaching of the Church. He says that option for the poor is a continuous spiritual challenge and struggle. Committed persons opting for the cause of the poor as the cause of God have to go through several stages of spirituality such as personal crisis, dark nights, challenges, material detachment, criticism and etc. The only assurance is that God is with them.

Dr Samuel Savio S.J in his article on Christian Response to the Failure of Saving Life critiques the health care unites and centers for their negligence and irresponsibility towards the protection and preservation of human life. It is the obligation of those who are responsible in the State as well as in the Central level to promote health and protect and preserve life at any cost. When the government fails in its duty to preserve the health care, the Catholic Church will spring into action to protect and promote justice in health care. If medicine and health care units are meant as services that have been set up for benefit of others, then they should respond to human need whenever and wherever it occurs and try to treat everyone fairly, appropriately and

justly. Let the government realize the tantamount importance of health care and medicine for the upkeep of the human life which is precious.

Dr Jeevaraj Lourdu in his article explains that God, the worker, created the human being in His own image and likeness. According to him, the Catholic social teaching presents human work is fundamental to human beings. It advocates the State to create more employment opportunities so that all must work to lead a decent life. The teachings condemned ill-treatments against the dignity of workers. The Church emphasized the rights of the workers to obtain just wage, the right to participate in the associations and to take part in the moral agitation against injustice done to the workers. Although Catholic social teachings (1891) focused only on the workers of the industries the modern and recent documents (1991) speak about all workers of all nations. In addition, the Catholic teachings asked the local churches to take decision for solving the problems of workers according to their own context.

Dr A. Albert

Editor