

# THE CATHOLIC CONTRIBUTION TO THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Rev. Peter L. Ruggere, M.M.

Peter Ruggere is an Associate at the Maryknoll Fathers', Brothers', Sisters' and Lay Missioners' Office of Social Concerns in Washington, DC.

## Introduction

This paper seeks to take a realistic approach -- that is, to recognize that in the modern secular world, religion has to justify its place as a contributor and player, and that the impact of documents and pronouncements from one specific religious group have by themselves little force. Facing the challenges of the new world order, the modern world has projects, theories, and analyses that can and do preclude any religious input.

At the same time, this paper presupposes that a Catholic contribution can have an important strategic effect -- strategic in the sense of action, conscientization, and mobilization toward a just world order.

This Catholic contribution has three theoretical sources:

- (1) Biblical theology, based on the central themes of salvation and redemption. The biblical source is especially important because it is shared by both Catholics and the Protestant and Orthodox traditions. The ecumenical impact is strategically very important.
- (2) Catholic Social Teaching (CST) -- the papal and hierarchical pastoral instructions dealing with social issues since 1891.
- (3) Liberation Theology, a revitalization of the biblical theme of salvation developed from below, from the perspective of solidarity with the oppressed. Liberation theology provides a much-needed counterbalance to the first-world-centeredness of Catholic Social Teaching.

These three sources form the basis for Catholic Social Theology. But it must remain clear that Catholic Social Theology does not have solutions to the major policy decisions which must be taken, nor does the Catholic perspective have its own theories of social, political, and economic development. The ideological and policy debates around these issues have their own life which flows from the a-religious, rationalist, and critical movements of the Enlightenment.

The importance and strength of the Catholic contribution is in the strategic support given to certain organizations, theories, policies, and solutions, and the oppositions mobilized against others.

The Church in the Modern World

Vatican II's openness to "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties" of the modern world was not easily achieved. The Catholic Church entered the modern era in the West weakened and under attack. The pre-Reformation Church had been a major player in society as a political and moral force providing many services of social assistance and charitable works, as well as being the ultimate arbiter of social morality. As the prime mover in the creation of medieval Europe from the chaos following the dissolution of the Roman Empire, the Church promoted stability as the central social value, and the resulting feudal system did provide centuries of social stability.

Three major movements -- the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution -- ended the social primacy of the Catholic Church. First of all, with the Reformation there was no longer one Church as social arbiter; and the newly established Protestant Churches, as well as the Catholic Church, lost ground before the emerging centralized nation-states.

Secondly, the Enlightenment established that autonomous human reason, independent of religious faith, could also provide answers to social questions. With the Enlightenment, a distinction was clearly established between moral values and ethical values. Moral values are those values which flow directly from a specific religious tradition, and which may or may not be shared by other religious traditions or by nonbelievers. Ethical values proceed from rational or philosophical analyses, and are generally agreed upon by believers from different religious traditions as well as nonbelievers. There developed the tendency to consider religion and morality as private areas of concern, whereas ethical values are those that all rational people can agree upon and which, when shared, can serve as the basis for public policy. This distinction is important to remember especially in dialogue with non-Western individuals and organizations who share a deep commitment to a just social order.

Thirdly, the legal and constitutional reforms of the French Revolution in Catholic countries removed the Church as a major social player. For example, by the end of the 19th century, the faculties of Catholic theology were expelled from many great universities, and the pope was legally just another Italian citizen.

The Catholic Church's reaction to these modern forces was to combat Protestantism; establish political alliances with European counterrevolutionary forces seeking the re-establishment of the *ancien régime*; and morally condemn the whole package of Enlightenment thought as the heresy of Modernism which was to be resisted at all costs.

## Catholic Social Teaching

Of course there were minority Catholic voices urging dialogue with the modern world, seeking to find principles and goals acceptable to Catholics, and allowing them to participate in the public arena. These voices found support in Pope Leo XIII (d. 1903) who, more by attitude than by teaching, opened doors for Catholic dialogue with the modern world. Pope Leo's writings, especially his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) are considered the beginning of what has come to be known as Catholic Social Teaching (CST).

CST has an important part to play in a Catholic perspective, but there are substantial limitations. At times, some Catholics assume that CST is a clear and coherent body of teachings, dealing with almost all social issues, which can be applied to most social questions. This is not the case. First of all, there is no clear

limit to what is included in CST. What are the official texts? Papal social pronouncements over the years are certainly included, but are all letters or articles by individual bishops on social issues to be included? What about the writings of theologians on social issues? CST evolved primarily as pastoral responses to social problems, challenges, and situations at different times and in different places. What makes a document or statement part of CST is not that it adheres to an organized body of thought, but simply that the theme of the teaching responds to a political, economic, or social issue.

And, of course, in CST there is the more serious problem of ideology. As with all social discourse, including theology, there is the underlying use -- sometimes acknowledged, sometimes not -- of differing philosophical positions and schools of social analysis.

Precisely because CST documents were issued at different times and in very different geographical and political situations, and employ different and (at times) conflicting social theories, the ability to utilize and apply CST has become a particularly Catholic area of exegesis. The use of arcane Latin names for some documents also does not help dialogue.

At the same time, it is necessary to highlight important constant themes in CST:

- s Authentic Catholicism must be involved with the social, political, and economic well-being of humanity.

- s Development cannot be limited to economic indicators and must reflect the quality of life.

- s Political authorities need to intervene in the economic sphere in order to protect the rights of the poor and the weak.

The primary importance of CST is internal to the Catholic community. Through the pastoral force of CST, Catholic individuals and organizations can be mobilized to exert considerable influence on and support for international organizations, such as the UN and its agencies, to promote social transformation.

### A Broader Ecumenical Approach: The Bible

Because of its intricacies, CST can contribute to, but not serve as, the basis for a Christian ecumenical perspective. The Bible can provide a basis for a broader ecumenical Christian perspective which would add strength to the struggle for a just world order.

### The Parable of the Garden

A key approach to the social perspective of the Bible is the parable of the Garden of Eden. A people saved from annihilation through God's saving and liberating love in the Exodus reflected on their experience; the Genesis poems and parables are the profound reflections of their theologians who, from the point of view of the uniqueness of their people's relationship to one unseen and unimaginable God, seek to help

their people maintain their moral role in history. For this people, surrounded by the powerful nations of Egypt and Babylon whose military power and architectural splendor far outshone their own, there was great temptation to abandon the difficult responsibility of being "a light to the nations."

The parable of the Garden of Eden is not a children's story, nor is it a pre-scientific attempt to explain the origins of creation or human life. Rather, the parable looks forward to what can be. The authors of the parable sought to answer very important questions: what is the purpose of life on earth, what is humanity's role in creation, and what is the source of evil and sin? These were and are valid questions. Central to the parable is the question of relationships. God is presented as owner of a fruitful garden. God places a man and a woman in charge of the garden, as beneficiaries of its bounty. There are three relationships:

s The first relationship is between the man and woman. Their unaffected nakedness symbolizes the transparency and equality of their relation to one another.

s The second relationship is between the couple and the garden, between humanity and the earth. This is a relationship of care and bountiful harvest.

s The third relationship is three-way, among the couple and the garden with God. God brought about and maintains the existence of the couple and the garden with its bountifulness.

The teaching and the hope of the parable is that the purpose of human life is to maintain a three-way harmony: within humanity; humanity with nature; and humanity and nature with God. When these harmonies break down, the source of disruption is found not with God nor with nature, but within humanity.

The Garden, then, puts the Catholic perspective in the ideological camp of those who are concerned with a care and respect for creation -- the environment -- and with those who support a guiding organization which will insure that the bounty of the earth's production be at the service of all.

## The Exodus/Covenant

The people who sought to explain their place in creation through the parable of the Garden did so based on their own historical experience of being saved from annihilation (Exodus) and formed into a liberated people (Covenant): "And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the Lord your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; and I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect." (Leviticus 26:12-13)

This covenant relation was to be maintained by a moral social response of a now-liberated people: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, render true judgments, show kindness and mercy each to his brother/sister, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor; and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart." (Zechariah 7:9-10) The experience of Israel, then, is that of God who is revealed as Defender of the poor: "Do not rob the poor because they are poor . . . for the Lord will plead their cause . . ." (Proverbs 22:22-23). This is the original option for the poor.

The unique Old Testament revelation of God as the One who ". . . knows well what they are suffering" (Exodus 3:7) underlies the option for the poor, which is to be institutionalized in the political, economic, and juridical structures of society. This perspective can be called biblical social justice.

Biblical justice must be contrasted to Western justice based on Roman law, which presupposes the equality of all before a blind and impartial judgment. Biblical justice denies equality before the law and presumes that the victim, by the very fact of being victim (poor, widowed, oppressed, abandoned, helpless) is in the right and that the purpose of justice, law, and social order is to restore that harmony in society whereby all humanity will benefit from the bounty of creation.

### God's Reign of Justice on Earth

These biblical demands for justice for the poor and oppressed as the basis for a new creation of harmony among humanity, the earth, and God become concretized for Christians in Jesus' proclaiming to the poor the good news of God's reign of justice on earth. Jesus' choice of "reign" or "kingdom" made sense in context, in that these were the words that gave social, political, economic, and structural content to his message. Today terms such as "world order," "social structures," or "a just society" convey the same meaning.

The confrontation between, on one side, Caesar's reign of violence, exploitation, and death, and on the other, God's reign of biblical justice on earth as it is in heaven, is epitomized in the confrontation between the imperial military occupier, Pontius Pilate, and Jesus of Nazareth (John 18:28-40). Pilate attempts to intimidate Jesus by asserting that he alone has the power to kill him or set him free, but that he will only set him free if he renounces any pretensions to an earthly influence, a social order in defiance of the reign of Caesar. Jesus answers that his kingdom does not have human origins, but yes, he is a king, and for that reason he has to transform this world. Caesar's servant has no alternative but to kill him in the way all who defied the dominant social order were killed: on a cross.

### Liberation Theology

This theology is born in the unique environment of Latin America, which is Catholic with a majority of economically poor and exploited people. A detailed discussion of Liberation Theology is beyond the scope of this paper, but two major relevant themes of this theological perspective are important to note:

s The preferential option for the poor. In hindsight, this option seems obvious and overwhelming in the Bible, but previous to Liberation Theology, "poverty" in Christian consciousness was either spiritualized as a "vow" or uncritically accepted as part of reality (put up with it and hope for "pie in the sky when you die"). The traditional Christian response to the poor was charity. Dom Helder Camara's profound remark pinpoints the change provoked by Liberation Theology: "When I gave food to the poor they called me a saint, but when I questioned why there were so many poor they called me a communist."

s Structural sin. Again, previous to Liberation Theology, sin was treated as just a personal rejection of the biblical injunction to "Love one another." Under this theology's influence, political and economic structures which deny the basic human rights to shelter, work, culture, and life itself are sinful and contrary to God's will that all have life abundantly.

### Catholics Take Sides in Ideological Debates

CST, the broader biblical ecumenical teachings, and Liberation Theology provide a moral backing for Catholic mobilization of individuals and organizations and provide the basis for Christian ecumenical action for a just world order. Catholics should join with others in taking up this struggle in the last years of the 20th century, entering the policy and ideological debates and mobilizations for a new world order -- not with solutions, but with biblical options and theological commitments, including:

s that a just social order is part of God's will for humanity;

s that the United Nations must be supported and strengthened as the main promoter of a just world order;

s that international declarations, charters, and laws governing a new social order must have a bias toward protecting the victim, the poor, the weak, the abandoned, and the refugee.

Choices must be made.

### Globalization

The context of these choices for the new world order is the phenomenon of globalization. Globalization is a product of the advances of modern science, especially in the areas of electronic means of communication and rapid transportation of people and goods. There is no global village or marketplace yet, but that is the general direction. Globalization opens the way for many possibilities, both just and unjust. For example:

s massive movements of capital around the world, which can transfer wealth and resources from the southern hemisphere to the north, or provide needed capital to underdeveloped areas;

s massive famines, or food from the surfeited to the hungry;

s labor conditions that benefit laborers in developed and underdeveloped nations;

s medical benefits from the developed to the underdeveloped parts of the world;

s sex tourism on an intercontinental scale;

s an ever-increasing gap between those who have too much of the world's goods and those who cannot survive.

The possibilities are there for a just new world order, or a planet of islands of wealth and privilege surrounded by vast zones of ecological devastation and human misery and death. How then to deal with the reality of globalization? By its very nature it is beyond the control of one nation. There are two ideological approaches.

(1) The first approach is to see in globalization primarily an opportunity to maximize profit through the increase of trade, guided by the "Big Three" (the newly created World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank). As the IMF's managing director, Michel Camdessus, recently stated:

With the globalization of the world economy, trade has become more complex, and trade liberalization more complex, more challenging. We are fortunate to have the forum and machinery established under the WTO to help move the process forward. The IMF, for its part, will join in this task through its surveillance and support of members' adjustment and reform efforts. . . . Thus the stage is set for the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank to work together toward the implementation of our complementary objectives.

Camdessus' view of the new world order is a triumph of reification, i.e. the reduction of human beings and human relations to money values. Karl Marx's original analysis of this tendency of capitalism in the last century is also echoed (without acknowledgment) by Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Laborum Exercens* (1981).

There is the growing, realistic awareness among Catholics that the successors to the reign of Caesar -- international governmental free-trade associations, e.g. the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as the transnational corporations -- have the will and the force to try to impose their opposing global reign of profit at all costs. Their efforts at regulating the world economy for profit maximization are channeled through the Big Three interrelated worldwide agencies.

2) Opposed to this reified and dehumanizing view is that of sustainable development, which prioritizes the harmony of humanity and nature over the maximization of trade and profits. James Gustave Speth, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Program, eloquently presents sustainable development:

Sustainable human development is, first of all, people-centered. It puts poor people first. It meets their basic needs, including the need to attain self-reliance, and it enlarges their opportunities, including the opportunities to live a long and healthy life, to be educated, and to have the employment needed for a decent standard of living.

Sustainable human development is also environmentally sound. It stresses the need to regenerate the natural resource base, to increase the long-term productivity of the resource sectors, and to protect the environment both locally and globally.

And sustainable human development is participatory. It can only be achieved where people have an opportunity to participate in the events and processes that shape their lives; where entrepreneurs, women, indigenous peoples, nongovernmental organizations, community groups, and others in civil society are empowered to take initiative and participate in both open markets and effective government; and where pluralism prevails and human rights and access to information of all types are guaranteed.

Sustainable human development is pro-poor and pro-nature. It gives highest priority to poverty alleviation, to environmental regeneration, and to job-led growth. And it recognizes that none of this is possible unless the status of women is elevated. Sustainable human development is pro-women.

Sustainable human development is an essential precondition to bringing human numbers into balance with the carrying capacities of nature and the coping capacities of societies.

Sustainable human development is not a straitjacket; it does not mean conditionality. It stresses the self-reliance and self-determination of governments and peoples. It is quite simply the only type of development that is consistent with the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the agreements signed at the Earth Summit by over 150 governments.

When we speak of a "new paradigm" or a "new model of development," it can sound top-down, imposed. This new paradigm is anything but top-down. Indeed, it is just the reverse. It is the world screaming back at us. It is screaming back in hunger, in pain, across the wastelands and dead waters. Only the purposefully deaf have not heard it.

## The United Nations

The above discussion on globalization serves to highlight the importance of the UN. The struggles between profit maximization and sustainable development take place at all levels and within all agencies of the UN. The Big Three would like to maintain the UN as a toothless tiger staying out of regional trade agreements while providing a cover of platitudes about world peace. Those who support sustainable development as the desired goal for a just new world order want the UN to be a major player promoting humanization, not reification.

The Catholic perspective has no independent or third-way alternative to offer, but must choose sides in these ideological debates and policy clashes. Recent papal support for the UN from popes Paul VI and John Paul II puts Catholics on the battlefield; and the biblical options for harmony between humanity and nature, and Liberation Theology's clear option for the materially poor, put the Catholic perspective on the side of sustainable development.

## The Human Rights Debate

At times, the UN does appear to be a mere bystander to the Big Three's profit-motivated manipulations of the environment, natural resources, human labor, and governments. But the UN has some formidable teeth, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which was adopted in 1948. This is the most important ethical document available around which popular conscientization and mobilization can be developed. But here again are found the treacherous currents of ideological and policy clashes.

The Preamble of the UDHR reflects the post-World War II cold-war milieu that produced it, by positing two sets of rights: "freedom of" rights and "freedom from" rights:

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people. . .

The Western capitalist focus on "freedom of speech and belief " was countered by the Soviet bloc's insistence on "freedom from fear and want." This debate, of course, is not either/or, but rather in terms of the ethical priority of one set of rights in relation to the other. This question was first broached by Marx in his criticism of Hegel's legal philosophy. Contrary to Hegel, Marx insisted that true human freedom involved more than legal protection of civil rights and equality before the law, and must be extended to the economy and the satisfaction of the human necessities of food, shelter, health, education, work, culture, and recreation.

The "freedom of" rights are specified in depth in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Here are the central points.

This covenant details the basic civil and political rights of individuals and nations.

Among the rights of nations are:

s the right to self-determination and the right to own, trade, and dispose of their property freely, and not be deprived of their means of subsistence

Among the rights of individuals are:

Article 1.2: the right to legal recourse when their rights have been violated, even if the violator was acting in an official capacity

Article 6.1: the right to life

Article 12.1: the right to liberty and freedom of movement

Article 14.1: the right to equality before the law

Article 14.2: the right to presumption of innocence till proven guilty

Article 14.5: the right to appeal a conviction

Article 16: the right to be recognized as a person before the law

Article 17.1: the right to privacy

Article 18.1: freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

Article 19.2: freedom of opinion and expression

Article 21: freedom of assembly

Article 22: association

Article 7: The covenant forbids torture and inhuman or degrading treatment

Article 20.1: propaganda advocating war

Article 20.2: hatred based on race, religion, national origin, or language

Article 23.2: It provides for the right of people to choose freely whom they will marry and to found a family

Article 23.4: requires that the duties and obligations of marriage and family be shared equally between partners

Article 24: guarantees the rights of children

Article 26: prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, color, national origin, or language

Article 6.2: restricts the death penalty to the most serious of crimes

Article 6.4: guarantees condemned people the right to appeal for commutation to a lesser penalty

Article 6.5: forbids the death penalty entirely for people under 18 years of age

Article 6.4: The covenant permits governments to suspend temporarily some of these rights in cases of civil emergency only

Article 28.1: establishes the UN Human Rights Commission.

After almost two decades of negotiations and rewriting, the text of the Universal Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was agreed upon in 1966. In 1976, after being ratified by the required 35 states, it became international law. This Covenant was ratified by the United States.

The question here is one of ethical priority. These "freedom of" rights are basic to human beings. But it is vital to remember that in the clash between the Big Three's free trade for profit and sustainable development, these civil rights have little or no relevance. The "freedom of" rights presume, but do little, to insure that there is a human population with life, strength, health, and education to provide the labor which will produce the wealth which is to be freely traded.

To insure that there is human life to enjoy the "freedom of" rights, the above-outlined Catholic perspective gives ethical priority to the "freedom from" rights of the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:

Preamble: Recognizing that, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his [or her] economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his [or her] civil and political rights and freedom. . . .

Article 6.1 The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his [or her] living by work which he [or she] freely chooses or accepts, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right.

Article 7 The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work which ensure, in particular:

Article 7.1 Remuneration which provides all workers, as a minimum, with: fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind, in particular women being guaranteed conditions of work not inferior to those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work; a decent living for themselves and their families in accordance with the provisions of the present Covenant;

Article 7.2 Safe and healthy working conditions;

Article 8.1.1 The right of everyone to form trade unions and join the trade union of his [or her] choice, subject only to the rules of the organization concerned, for the promotion and protection of his [or her] economic and social interests. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public order or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others;

Article 8.1.2 The right of trade unions to establish national federations or confederations and the right of the latter to form or join international trade union organizations;

Article 9 The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance;

Article 11.1 The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself [or herself] and his [or her] family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

Article 12.1 The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Article 13.1 The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Article 15. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone: to take part in cultural life; to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications.

Article 25 Nothing in the present Covenant shall be interpreted as impairing the inherent right of all peoples to enjoy and utilize fully and freely their natural wealth and resources.

This Covenant has not been ratified by the United States.

## Conclusion

The UN, in spite of its limitations, is the only organization that has the clout to counterbalance the well-thought-out and very well-financed plans of those who control the Big Three to mold globalization into an arena for profit maximization and for subjecting nations, peoples, and sectors of the planet to specific profit-generating operations.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its Covenants can become the ethical backbone for UN decision-making. 1998 is the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights. The most important contribution that the Catholic community can make is, relying on its rich Catholic Social Theology roots,

to mobilize its considerable forces, its educational, parish, and social organizations, to conscientization and action together with secular and other faith-based organizations in promoting the Declaration and giving ethical priority to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.