

Development Through Solidarity: Reading and Commenting "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis"

INTRODUCTION

Peoples and individuals aspire to be free. The aspiration to freedom from all forms of slavery affecting the individual and society is something noble and legitimate. The way to full freedom and peace is the path of development — and liberation — through the practice of solidarity. Solidarity is now the new name of peace.

Thus teaches Pope John Paul II in his most challenging and, perhaps, innovative encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRS): *On the Social Concerns of the Church*. Signed by the Pope on December 30, 1987, SRS is the seventh encyclical letter issued by John Paul II. It underlines the international dimension of the social question and focuses it on development and solidarity.

The social doctrine of the Church is part of her evangelizing mission; it is not, however, "a third way" to liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism. The Church offers no technical solutions, nor economic or political systems or programmes. She offers a word on social questions: a word to "orient Christian conduct,"

a social word which is part of her mission of service, a prophetic word which denounces evil and, above all, proclaims liberation (SRS, no. 41).

Issued on the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (PP) by Paul VI, SRS celebrates "the enduring relevance" (2) and "force" (4) of PP, and dynamically applies its basic teachings to our current situation (cf. 3, 4).

As any other document of the social doctrine of the Church, SRS is a point of arrival of this doctrine, in particular of PP, and a point of departure for the following social teachings.

Addressed not only to Catholics but also to *all people of good will*, SRS is divided into seven chapters, including the *Introduction* (I), and the *Conclusion* (VII). After pointing out the originality of Paul VI's PP (II), John Paul II develops the three main and most powerful chapters, namely, *Survey of the Contemporary World* (III), *Authentic Human Development* (IV), and *A Theological Reading of Modern Problems* (V). In chapter VI, the Pope puts forward *Some Particular Guidelines* for action, that flow from the social doctrine of the Church.

To present an updated and creative version of Paul VI's encyclical *On the Development of Peoples*, John Paul II uses the method of social ethics by investigating sociologically, theologically and pastorally the categories of development and solidarity (cf. 4).

In reading and commenting on SRS, we shall follow the three-stages method: first, we try to see and judge the situation of our world; second, we describe and define authentic human development, and, third, we study solidarity as the main ethical category we all need to be able to work positively for true development. We shall also take up Paul VI's pace-setting PP as point of reference.

1. THE SOCIAL SITUATION TODAY

Twenty years after the publication of PP, what is the situation of development-underdevelopment in our world? What are its positive and negative aspects? Who — or what — are responsible for its negative elements?

In chapter three, the longest chapter of SRS, John Paul II views the world within the framework of development and sees a rather negative picture.

1.1 Negative and Positive Elements

Although *all is not negative in our world* (26), the social situation is mainly negative. The Pope writes twenty four pages to analyze sociologically and judge ethically the international social question in terms of development or, better, underdevelopment and superdevelopment.

From the viewpoint of development, writes John Paul II, "the present situation of the world offers a rather negative impression" (13): for many millions of persons, the situation has noticeably worsened (13); the phenomenon of poverty — even in the developed countries — is growing (16); there is substantial division between the two blocs — East and West — dominating the world (20); the gap between the developed and the developing countries is widening (14); the looming atomic peril generates anxiety in the whole world (27). Indeed, we live in a divided and inhospitable world (24), a world subject to structures of sin (36).

In particular, the Pope denounces the huge military expenditures which stifle economic and human needs (22): arms production and arms trade, which are really a desertion of a moral obligation (23); the stockpiling of atomic weapons, which leads the world towards death (24); the millions of refugees surviving around the world (24); the commission of many acts of terrorism, which can never be justified (24); some negative aspects of present demographic trends (25); shortage of food, violation of human rights, wars, illiteracy, dependence, discrimination (15). Truly, our world is passing through a difficult period (49). Moreover, one cannot but underline this scandal: in the midst of great poverty around the world, rich countries and persons continue to display selfishness and to flaunt their wealth (49). In the context of underdevelopment, huge sums of money are utilized for the enrichment of individuals or groups, or assigned to military preparations, and not for the development of peoples (10).

In 1967, Paul VI said that underdevelopment was the main social problem of humanity. In 1987, John Paul II writes that

underdevelopment and superdevelopment are the social questions of our age. Underdevelopment, he added, is especially manifested in the housing crisis (17), unemployment and underemployment (18), and the international debt (19).

Paul VI wrote then: "Today the peoples in hunger are making a dramatic appeal to the peoples blessed with abundance" (PP, 3). John Paul II writes now: "One of the greatest injustices in the contemporary world consists precisely in this: that the ones who possess much are relatively *few* and those who possess almost nothing are *many*" (SRS, 28).

Fortunately, *all is not negative in our world*. Therefore, something is positive. What is it?

In general, there is a new moral concern regarding development, peace, solidarity, human rights, the common good. And there is a rising number of persons, groups of persons, non-governmental and governmental organizations committed to solve the social problems of the world, including underdevelopment (26).

In particular, the Pope stresses the positive efforts being made by the two blocs, to diminish the dangers of total war (20). The praiseworthy efforts of the International Movement of Non-Aligned Nations also affirm "the right of every people to its own identity, independence and security, as well as the right to share, on a basis of equality and solidarity, in the goods intended for all" (21).

Furthermore, there is a growing awareness of and respect for human dignity and rights, and a strong rejection of their violations; there is also a particular sensitivity towards specific cultural identities; that is, "to the preservation, free exercise and promotion of their precious heritage" (26).

Besides, we have today a growing sense of the basic unity, radical interdependence and common dignity of all persons and peoples, and, consequently, of the universal duty to practice solidarity (26). There is a deeper and wider perception of the right to life and peace and justice, and, as a consequence, of "a fair distribution of the results of true development" (26).

Finally, John Paul II points out innovatively ecological concerns as another positive aspect of our situation (26).

Concerning the question of development, there was great optimism in the 60's; there is much pessimism in the 80's. That optimism and this pessimism are noticeable in PP and SRS respectively. While Paul VI was then charged with exaggerated optimism, John Paul II has been declared by some as a pessimist. Optimist or pessimist, both Popes are rather realistic and hopeful: the Church has confidence in the human being who is the created image of God, recreated in Christ and constantly renewed by the Holy Spirit.

1.2 Causes of the Negative Situation

Who were responsible for the scandalous economic, political and social inequalities in 1967, for situations "whose injustice cries to heaven (PP, 30)? Paul VI answered: mainly responsible were the developed countries and their protectionist policies (PP, 8); partly responsible, also the developing countries, that were not, as much as they could be, the first agents of their own development (PP, 55).

Who — or what — are the causes of our present worsening social situation? John Paul II answers: mainly responsible are the developed countries — the developed North —; that is, the economically and politically powerful countries. Indeed, as it has been underscored by many theologians, the wealthy nations develop at the expense of the poor and exploited nations (cf. SRS, 9, 16, 32).

Why do we find little or irregular or even contradictory development in developing countries? There are economic, political and moral reasons. The basic reason, however, is the division of the world in two opposing blocs, namely, the East and the West. *Economic reasons are:* a principally economic idea of development, which is too narrow (15), and perverse financial as well as social mechanisms which favor "the interests of the people manipulating them" (16). *Political reasons are:* lack of "an effective political will" to overcome the mechanisms which lead to underdevelopment and superdevelopment (35).

Among the causes of underdevelopment, or those who are also responsible for it, are the developing countries themselves, the developing South: grave instances of omissions (16); dependence on the developed countries (44); borrowing perhaps imprudently and occasionally hastily (19).

Again, we reaffirm that the main cause of the dark situation of our world are the developed countries of the First and Second world; that is, the two super-powers which divide humanity, namely, *liberal capitalism* and *Marxist collectivism*. They both provide two imperfect concepts of the development of persons and peoples — so imperfect that both are in need of radical corrections (21). Both ideologies and political systems and socio-economic powers tend towards imperialism and neo-colonialism. Moreover, both have an unacceptably exaggerated concern for security, which becomes an obstacle to unity and to the implementation of the right of people to a share in the goods of the earth intended for all (22).

While Paul VI denounced with strong words capitalism, calling it "a woeful system," and also collectivism, but less explicitly (cf. PP, 26, and 18-19; 33 and 39), John Paul II condemns both systems symmetrically, as he did earlier in his other great social encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (LE): "The existence and opposition of the blocs continue to be a real and worrying fact which still colours the world picture" (SRS, 20). Thus, the Church adopts a *critical attitude* towards both (21). In particular, in other Church documents transnational corporations are singled out as concrete sources of economic and social injustices.

What are the *moral and theological causes* of the negative elements of our situation? John Paul II responds: personal sins and structures of sin. These moral categories are the root of the evils in our world (36). The development of the moral category of *structures of sin* constitutes another important innovation found in SRS.

As taught earlier by John Paul II, structures of sin are rooted in personal sins; that is, in bad concrete acts of individuals. They are "the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins" (*Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 16; *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 56; SRS, 36).

In SRS, the Pope points out two main bad attitudes, or vices, that influence and create sinful social structures and inspire modern forms of idolatry such as money, ideology, class, technology. They are: the all-consuming desire for profit and the thirst for power; both are indissolubly united (37).

Paul VI said over twenty years ago that the main moral sickness of our world was lack of fraternity (PP, 66). John Paul II writes that today instead of interdependence and solidarity we have different forms of imperialism and, therefore, a world subject to structures of sin (36). The affluent countries, the present Pope adds, have not helped the poor countries as they are called to do by their duty of solidarity (16).

2. THE MAIN CONCEPT: DEVELOPMENT

Pope Paul VI's main statements on the nature and characteristics of authentic human development continue to be relevantly true as well as urgently challenging. In order to be authentic, "development must be integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man" (PP, 14.) Hence, development is personal and social. It is "a development which is for each and all the transition from less human conditions of life to those which are more human" (PP, 20; cf. *Ib.*, 21).

For his part, John Paul II speaks of authentic (SRS, 1), integral (32), true (33), full (30) and universal human development (17). In chapter four of SRS, he studies *authentic human development* and analyzes its different dimensions; that is, the human, social, cultural, economic and ecological dimensions. Above all, the Pope talks of the moral dimension of development. This dimension is considered by many commentators of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* as one of its most creative points.

2.1 The Moral Character of Development

John Paul II studies the various dimensions of development within the universal perspective of interdependence (9), as liberation (93-94), as path to freedom and peace. The linking thread of his study is *the essentially moral character of development* (35).

All through the 103-page encyclical, the Pope proposes and defends cogently an authentic human development for all persons and peoples by appealing to conscience, a hierarchy of values, human dignity and rights, justice, the common good, solidarity and peace, love of God and love of neighbor. His constant appeal to morality, to the ethical and spiritual character of human life and activities is, in fact, one of the characteristics of his overall papal teaching. At the beginning of his pontificate he had said:

Primacy must be given to what is moral, to what is spiritual, to what springs from the full truth concerning man (*Puebla Conference Inaugural Address*, III, 4).

The essential meaning of the 'kingship' and 'dominion' of man over the visible world... consists in the priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and in the superiocrity of spirit over matter (*Redemptor Hominis*, 16).

John Paul II's repeated moral appeal is a human and Christian call rooted in humanity and faith. In the context of development, it is the Church's pastoral duty to teach the nature and properties of authentic human development. Faith in Christ illuminates from within the nature of development and guides the Christians in the task of collaboration (31). From a Christian perspective, the work for development is defined in relation to the work of creation and redemption.

Concerning the moral dimension of development the Church speaks, in particular, of the values of "being" and "having" and of their hierarchy. "Having" (possessions, the right to property) is subordinated to "being" (personal self-realization, happiness), *specially when the "having" of a few can be to the detriment of the "being" of many others* (31). Paul VI had said earlier that the goal of integral development was principally not "to have more" but "to be more": "to seek to do more, know more and have more in order to be more" (PP, 6). He added that the supreme purpose of development was the ordering of human life towards God (PP, 16).

For every person, true development is rooted in the love that unites all human beings. For the Christian, true development is

also based upon love of God and neighbor: on charity (33). From a theological perspective, in Christian social ethics, true development is liberation from personal sins and structures of sin (46).

2.2 Other Dimensions of Development

Human Development

In the social doctrine of the Church the human person is "the beginning, the center and the end of all socio-economic activities" (Vatican II, GS, 63). The dignity of man, as stated by John Paul II in the Philippines (February, 1981), is the criterion of all social activities. Regarding development, likewise, the human person is the *protagonist of development*: always the human person (SRS, 30). Therefore, John Paul II concludes, authentic human development must respect and promote all the dimensions of the human person (1).

True development has to be "measured and oriented according to the reality and vocation of man seen in his totality, namely, according to his *interior dimension*" (29). Development is not merely a "lay" or "profane" activity, but, the Pope says, the modern expression of an essential dimension of man's vocation (30). As such it implies an idea of the human person and ethical commitment: anthropology and ethics connect the hiatus between what a human person is and what he ought to be to become more.

The human person is a creature of God. Created in God's image and likeness, he possesses a bodily and spiritual nature (29). As a creature of God, he was given the task of "cultivating the garden," that is, of developing the cosmos dynamically and creatively, but according to the plan of God, who is the Creator. Sin and sins have disturbed and disrupted the human person's required subordination to God, and Christ the Redeemer opened back the humans' possibility of becoming again children of God. Nevertheless, the human person still can and does disobey God, hence introducing failure in the process of development. From a religious perspective, "today's 'development' is to be seen as a moment in the story which began at creation, a story which is constantly endangered by reason of infidelity to the Creator's will, and especially by the temptation of idolatry" (30).

Human development entails the development of the human being as an individual and as a social being, as transcendental; that is, opened to God, to others, to nature (cf. 29). Human development, then, is also social; that is, socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic. It is, in truth, a universal social development: "either *all* the nations of the world participate, or it will not be true development" (17).

Development as a mission of man's vocation implies *the difficult yet noble task of improving the lot of man in his totality, and of all people* (30). To work for full development of persons and peoples is a *duty of all towards all, and must be shared by the four parts of the world — East and West, North and South, or, as we say today, by the different worlds* (32).

Development and Human Rights

Human social development is rooted in human dignity and ordered to the defense and promotion of human rights: personal and social, economic and political rights (33).

To be able to really respect and promote the human rights of all, human persons and peoples must be aware of "the value of the rights of all and of each person" and, in particular, to be keenly aware "of the need to respect the right of every individual to the full use of the benefits offered by science and technology" (Ib.).

At the *internal level* of a nation, the Pope underlines the right to life "at every stage of its existence"; the rights of the family, the basic social community; the right to justice in employment relationships; political rights, and religious rights, particularly the right of religious freedom (33).

At the *international level* of relationships between and among nations, the Pope stresses the right of all to a share in the goods of the earth and in the process of development — a right rooted in the fundamental equality of all persons and States. Quoting Paul VI, the current Pope states dramatically that it is essential to recognize each people's equal rights to be seated at the table of the common banquet, instead of lying outside the door like Lazarus, while the dogs come and lick his sores (cf. Lk. 16:21; SRS, 33; PP. 47).

All nations and persons must also respect and defend cultural rights. There must be, the Pope affirms, *complete respect for the identity of each people, with their own historical and cultural characteristics* (33).

Authentic human development recognizes and promotes all human rights, the various dimension of development, including the *cultural, transcendent and religious dimensions of humans*: "human beings are totally free only when they are completely themselves, in the fullness of their rights and duties" (46).

How do humans reach full personal and social development? John Paul II answers: in the first place, the development of peoples is achieved through their own commitment to true development. In the second place, authentic development is achieved in collaboration with other nations and peoples, especially those who belong to the same region. Finally, integral development is attained in cooperation with all, for all form one human family.

Economic Development

Analyzing the different dimensions of development, the Pope speaks first against economism or a development which is only or mainly economic (cf. LE, 13). Certainly development is also economic. The human person, the subject and object of development, as Fr. Lebreton said, is a creature with a body and a soul: he has also economic or material needs which have to be satisfied to be able to develop properly — to be and become more.

Nevertheless, the predominance of the economic dimension of development in the past decades has been mainly responsible for the failure of peoples to go forward to full development, to achieve the common good, or common happiness. We have to condemn ethically not only underdevelopment, but also superdevelopment.

Superdevelopment is ethically evil. It is an "excessive availability of every kind of material goods for the benefit of certain social groups" that enslave people, who become possessed by possession, by a consumeristic, materialistic and selfish mentality. On moral key, we say: first, "mere accumulation of goods and services" is not enough; it can be an obstacle to making people happy; likewise, "real benefits" of economic development stemming

from science and technology cannot by themselves free people from other forms of slavery. Second, having too much and wasting so much leave people unsatisfied and insensitive to the just cry of the poor for a share in the goods of the earth and the products of development. The cult of "having" deprives millions of human beings of their "being" as persons (cf. SRS, 28). Paul VI had said earlier that "both for nations and for individuals, avarice is the most evident form of underdevelopment" (PP, 19).

Development and Ecology

SRS is the first official document of the social doctrine of the Church to connect engagingly development and ecological concerns (34). These are considered within the ethical horizon. The human being is a creature superior to the other creatures of the universe. He has "dominion" over them (cf. Gen 1:25-26). But not an absolute dominion, because his dominion is limited, and under God and His laws (Gen 2:16-17).

From this theological basis, the moral consequences are the following: the earth's ecosystems and biodiversity must be respected by all; natural resources are limited and, therefore, not infinitely available; pollution of the environment, which jeopardizes the health of the population, is unethical and makes some programs of industrialization responsible for it. While reading this part, Fulton Sheen's pithy phrase came to our mind: "Moral garbage is the cause of ecological garbage."

The growing ecological concern is a sign of our times. The Philippine Bishops came out a year ago with an excellent pastoral letter on ecology and responsibility entitled *What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land* (CBCP, January, 1988).

3. THE PRIMACY OF SOLIDARITY

In 1967, Paul VI spoke of the need to build a *civilization of universal solidarity* (PP, 71), and wished that individuals as well as social groups "join hands in brotherly fashion: the strong helping the weak to grow" (PP, 75). In 1979, John Paul II wrote on the *principle of solidarity* (*Redemptor Hominis*, 16); now he talks

of the *duty of solidarity* of every individual and nation. For the author of SRS, solidarity is the central ethical category, the main attitude persons and peoples have to possess to work effectively for authentic human development and liberation, for justice and peace.

What is solidarity? Is it, above all, solidarity with the poor? Is solidarity, with justice, the journey to development and peace?

3.1 Human and Christian Solidarity

Beside the economic obstacles to development there are also moral impediments; that is, individual sins and sinful structures. Consequently, to make the journey to integral development we all — persons and countries — need to change our *spiritual attitudes*; basically, to be converted to God who is “the only true foundation of an absolutely binding ethic,” to be converted to the neighbor and also to nature. We all need to acquire and strengthen the good attitude or virtue of solidarity (38-40).

Human Solidarity

According to John Paul II, solidarity “is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people”; but, “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” It implies “a commitment to the good of one’s neighbor with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to ‘lose oneself’ for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and ‘serve him’ instead of oppressing him for one’s own advantage” (cf. Mt 10:40-42; 20:25; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:25-27; SRS, 38). The virtue of solidarity helps to see the other person — or country — not as an object, but as a subject, a neighbor, a “helper” (cf. Gen 2:18-20), as equal sharer in the banquet of life.

Solidarity is not solidarity of some against some others; but solidarity of all against no one. It cannot exclude a person or a country: all persons and countries are essentially equal in dignity and rights. However, solidarity, true solidarity is addressed principally to the poor persons and countries, to those who do not have yet a just share in the goods of the earth.

Christian Solidarity

Like any other human virtue, solidarity is also a Christian virtue, which is intimately connected with charity, the Christian virtue of love of God and love of neighbor. It is the practice of love of neighbor through which the "other" becomes a brother or sister in Christ, "another I" for whom the Christian in love is ready to sacrifice himself, even to the point of giving his life in his service (cf. I Jn 3:16). John Paul II writes that Christian solidarity gives to human solidarity the dimensions of *total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation* (40).

If human solidarity is exercised principally towards the poor, Christian solidarity or fraternity is equally so, but in a deeper and clearer manner due to the presence and urgings of God's grace and love. Jesus said: "You are all brothers" (Mt 23:8). The Christian's models of solidarity are the saints, specially Mary the Mother of God, who followed Christ's total solidarity with all, above all with the poor and weak. Mary and the saints are also intercessors before God. Mary's maternal concern, writes the Pope, "extends to the personal and social aspects of people's life on earth" (49).

Solidarity, which entails empathy and sharing, leads persons and peoples to fraternal collaboration in the field of development and liberation, of justice and peace; to international and regional collaboration, and to the internal collaboration of all citizens for national development. The attitude of solidarity helps all to cooperate with all in general, with some more closely, but "without opposing anyone" (45).

3.2 The Priority of Solidarity: The Poor

Solidarity, then, is the good attitude or virtue, a good operative habit, we all need to develop fully: the rich, the middle class, the poor. Although it is the same virtue — or spirit — in all, it implies different forms of commitment. For *the rich persons and countries*, it means to share their possessions with the poor and neglected. "A greater responsibility rests on those who have more and can do more" (47).

For the *intermediate groups*, solidarity entails that they go beyond their selfish interests and respect the interests of others, specially the poor and weak (39).

For *the poor*, solidarity signifies not to adopt a purely passive attitude or a destructive one, but on active and constructive disposition: to do what they can for the good of all. The weak and poor nations, the Pope tells us, are obliged to contribute to the common good with the richness of their humanity and culture. They have to claim their legitimate rights. To achieve this, the Pope advises the solidarity of the poor among themselves to defend their rights through non-violence, also through public demonstrations and, as a legitimate but extreme means, through strikes (cf. LE, 20).

The Church's duty is to be "at the side of the poor, to discern the justice of their requests, and to help satisfy them, without losing sight of the good of groups in the context of the common good" (39).

For *every Christian*, solidarity with the poor means morally and theologically the *option or love of preference for the poor*, or the so-called *preferential option for the poor*: "a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity" (42).

The praxis of this option, or solidarity with the poor in action, affects the whole life of Christians; that is, not only their individual lives, but their social responsibilities as well. It includes the following: to be aware of the reality of poverty, and of its necessary implications concerning their life style, which must be sober, and their use of the goods, which implies sharing them with the poor.

Sharing with the poor is based upon the principle prevalent in Christian tradition, that the goods of the earth belong to God, who created them for all. But, what about the *right to private property*?

Paul VI said: "The right to private property does not constitute for anyone an unconditional and absolute right" (PP. 23). While the right to private property, John Paul II tells us, is "valid and necessary," its exercise is under "a social mortgage," which

means "that it has an intrinsically social function, based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of goods" (SRS, 42). Indeed, "the right of private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone" (LE, 14). We may add, that this is the clear teaching of the Fathers of the Church and, in a particularly powerful manner, of St. Thomas Aquinas. We recall here St. Thomas' basic text:

Man has a two-fold competence in relation to material things. The first is the title to care for and distribute the earth's resources. Understood in this way, it is not merely legitimate for a man to possess things as his own, it is even necessary for human life. Man's other competence is to use and manage the world's resources. Now in regard to this, no man is entitled to manage things merely for himself, he must do so in the interest of all, so that he is ready to share them with others in case of necessity (II-II, 66, 2).

What is the meaning of the option for the poor with regards to development? According to the Pope, the love of preference for the poor demands a series of necessary reforms, particularly in international economy, including the reform of the international trade system, the world monetary and financial system, forms of technology and their transfer (42). We need, in fact, a New International Economic Order, based on a new Juridical Order (cf. 43).

3.3 Peace, The Fruit of Solidarity

Paul VI had said: "Development is the new name of peace": to work for the development of peoples is to work for peace; and this work entails "a more perfect form of justice among men" (PP, 76).

There is still today, as John Paul II says, a universal *demand for justice* that needs to be answered if we really want that "the other" violence of unjust social structures be not answered by plain violence. The demand of justice entails a fair distribution of the goods of the earth: "Peace is either for all or for none. It demands an ever greater degree of rigorous respect for justice and

consequently a fair distribution of the results of true development" (26).

Peace is still the fruit of justice: *Opus iustitiae pax* (Pius XII). It requires the practice of social justice, the object of which is the common good, and of international or universal justice (39). It also demands necessarily, as always taught by the Church, a *commitment to justice* (41), including a commitment to authentic human development. If "*development is the new name of peace,*" *war and military preparations are the major enemies of the integral development of people* (10).

The practice of justice, however, is not enough to achieve fully internal and international development and peace. We need to practice solidarity which implies and goes beyond justice, and is the best path to development and peace:

For world peace is inconceivable unless the world's leaders come to recognize that *interdependence* in itself demands the abandonment of the politics of blocs, the sacrifice of all forms of economic, military or political imperialism, and the transformation of mutual distrust into *collaboration*. This is precisely the *act proper* to solidarity among individuals and nations (39).

Certainly, *opus iustitiae pax*, but also — and better — *Opus solidaritatis pax* (John Paul II). As our Pope said in the Philippines, *only love can make people really responsible to the call of the needy* (cf. *Dives in Misericordia*, 12).

Through development, then, we reach out to peace and to a new world, "where freedom is not an empty word and where the poor Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man" (PP, 47). And, through justice and solidarity, to development, liberation and peace.

4. OUR RESPONSE

The social doctrine of the Church is an important part of her ministry of teaching, of her evangelizing mission. Christians are asked by their faith to follow the Church's *Magisterium*, including the *Ordinary Magisterium* of papal encyclicals like *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. Through its social doctrine, through its encyclicals, the Church "seeks to lead people to

respond... to their vocation as responsible builders of the earthly society" (SRS, 1).

To follow, to respond to the social doctrine of the Church, we have to know it and, therefore, to study it. How do we respond to SRS? By reading it, reflecting upon it and acting accordingly.

4.1 Action, Please!

John Paul II's SRS is an excellent social document in line with Paul VI's PP. But excellent social documents do not change selfish humans and sinful social structures. What we need is to honestly try to carry out the teaching of SRS. This is the way to transform the negative elements of our present social situation. After all, our Christian faith will not be saving unless it is lived in hope and love. Our hope in heaven will not usually attain its eternal goal unless it is anticipated by our strong efforts to help realize the human hopes of development, liberation and peace (cf. 48). To be saving, however, our endeavors must be expressions of fraternity. We are pilgrims on the way to God's Kingdom; but, as St. Augustine tells us, we can only journey forward with steps of love — and of the other virtues as mediations of love.

Therefore, *the hour for action has now been sounded* (PP, 80). This is an imperative which obliges each and every man and woman as well as societies and nations (SRS, 32). The Pope tells us that *there is no justification for despair, or pessimism or inertia; that there is no convincing argument for an attitude of fear, indecision or cowardice* (47).

Every individual is called upon to play his or her part in this *peaceful* campaign, a campaign to be conducted by *peaceful* means, in order to secure *development in peace*, in order to safeguard nature itself and the world about us (47).

All our efforts and measures geared towards human development must be inspired by an attitude of solidarity with all, especially with the needy, namely, the poor nations and persons.

For the Christian, in particular, the preferential option for the poor is the radical priority of his practice of the virtue of solidarity. With all men and women of good will, with other

Christians and believers, Catholics cannot "but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and, above all, those without hope of a better future. To ignore them would mean becoming like the rich man who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate" (cf. Lk 16:19-31; SRS, 42). Indeed, "no man has the right to live like the rich man while Lazarus is at the gate" (W. Barclay).

Christians, in particular, are asked by John Paul II to serve as examples and guides of true commitment to human social development. Following Jesus, the Way, they have to preach the good news to the poor... (cf. Lk 4:18-19), to be witnesses and agents of peace and justice (47).

The Church and all her members are obliged to give not only out of their "abundance" but also out of their "necessities." In this context we find one of the most radical texts of SRS:

Faced by cases of need, one cannot ignore them in favor of superfluous church ornaments and costly furnishings for divine worship; on the contrary, it could be obligatory to sell these goods in order to provide food, drink, clothing and shelter for those who lack these things (31).

This text is really biblical and prophetic, an echo of the teachings of Fathers of the Church on the universal destiny of the goods of the earth and the obligation of those who have to share with those who do not have — not only out of charity but also out of justice. A representative text from St. Basil:

He who takes the clothes from a man is a thief. He who does not clothe the indigent, when he can, does he deserve another name but thief? The bread that you keep belong to the hungry; to the naked, the coat that you hide in your coffers; to the shoeless, the shoes that are dusty at your home; to the miserable, the silver that you hide. In brief, you offend all those who can be helped by you (*Hom. VII in famen*, I:PG 31, 325).

In our response to SRS, we need *to be convinced* that to work for authentic development is required by our humanity and our faith. We have *to be committed* with others to the serious task of fight-

ing underdevelopment. However, to be able to bridge the gap between our conviction and our commitment, we must be converted — to God, to neighbor, to the cosmos. We ought to be converted to God so that our personal sins and our participation in structural sins will be forgiven by God while at the same time we become, through His grace and love, new creatures, ready to work effectively, through solidarity, for development and liberation. Hard work?

Yes. But we are not alone. God is with us: He is present in the world, in the neighbor, specially in the poor and weak neighbor, and most specially in the Eucharist — Real Presence, Sacrament and Sacrifice:

The Lord unites us with Himself through the Eucharist and unites us with Himself and with one another by a bond stronger than any natural union; and thus united, he sends us into the whole world to bear witness, through faith and works, to God's love, preparing the coming of His Kingdom and anticipating it, though in the obscurity of the present time (48).

Realizing our weakness and our sinfulness, our radical poverty, we ask God through the Sacraments, especially Penance and Eucharist, and through personal and communitarian prayer, to help us, to give us his grace and love so that we can fulfill our grave duty of solidarity for development.

We pray also to the saints, our models of solidarity, and our intercessors before God. In particular we pray to Mary, the Mother of God and our spiritual Mother, to intercede for us, to help us be committed to development by the path of solidarity. We still need "wine," that is, justice, peace, truth, love. We need her maternal concern to praise God like she does: "He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent empty away" (Lk. 1:52-53).

4.2 SRS, "Rightist" or "Leftist"?

After reading and reflecting on *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* some of us might be inclined — as others before us must have done —

to dismiss it as "another encyclical"! Perhaps, too, we might be tempted to label it as radical or conservative, as rightist or leftist. These temptations are just temptations; that is, invitations to evil! Let us not fall into them. T. S. Eliot used to say that if you do not like someone, just label him; it is a way to discredit him.

Others prefer to praise the document, but with all kinds of "buts" and "ifs" and minute distinctions. This is another way to water down the urgent call to action of SRS. We are not saying that an encyclical is Gospel-truth, and that it should not be discussed and debated upon. Of course not. We are only underscoring that the main point is to act upon it. Therefore, let not "the finer points" deviate us from the radical point: *a concrete and urgent and obligatory call to action for development through solidarity*. The following words of Andrew Greeley are also applicable to SRS: "The fundamental weakness of *Quadragesimo Anno* and the Catholic social theory that it articulates formally is not that it has been tried and found wanting, but found hard and not tried."

As Christians we are obliged to follow the basic teaching of SRS. It is the least we ought to do. We can do more but not less. To do less would mean "to be left outside the faith of the Church" (J.M. Oses).

Let us, then, be committed to development by the way of solidarity. What matters is not whether the Pope is liberal or conservative on social matters, but that he is, like Jesus, with the poor and the suffering of our societies and communities. Facing the situation of underdevelopment and misery and poverty and suffering of many millions in our world, it is *the Lord Jesus who comes to question us* (SRS, 13): "What are you doing for the poor persons and countries?" And to tell us: "What you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do it to me" (Cf. Mt. 25:31-46).

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