

CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE: BUILDING A SENSE OF WORLD COMMUNITY WITH MORE JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Dr. Paulus Wiryono P.,SJ

“The fate of mankind depends upon the emergence of a new faith in the future” (Teilhard de Chardin, SJ) ¹

INTRODUCTION

Having study background in Agricultural and Food Sciences, being a Jesuit provincial for six years (1996-2002), and taking participation in several international Jesuit meetings on social issues, I preferred to share with the participants of this Yogyakarta 2009 Pax Romana International Conference, the perspective of Catholic faith on the issue of how to sustain our humanity in the world characterized by un-equality, violence, and un-sustainability. Un-equality, violence, and un-sustainability are three interconnected problems that we have to solve together at global level. The kind of Catholic perspective that I am going to present is more based on my personal reflection. Hopefully, it will be in congruence with the formal social teachings of the Catholic Church.

The way how I presented the issue might be felt more as an unfinished question or even a provocative question rather than as a finished answer. We all know that it is a big and difficult issue to answer. Yet, it is a very powerful and inspiring issue. Through discussing this issue we can develop a new awareness, a new sense, a new enlightenment, or a better understanding about how united we have been as human beings living in today's world and yet how risky will be our unity without it. Teilhard de Chardin's statement written above invites us to orient ourselves to the future on the basis of religious faith. But the environmentalists build their future orientation more on the basis of morally forward-looking (Leslie Paul Thiele, 1999). How will these two different future orientations meet each other? It is a very interesting theme to discuss. But, let we put it here as a question without answer.

In the field of Agricultural and Food Sciences, the issue has been discussed widely since 1960s with more specific topics as shown by titles of published books such as: *Silent Spring* (Rachel Carson, 1962), *The Population Bomb* (Paul Ehrlich, 1968), *Limits to Growth* (Donella H. Meadows et.all, 1972), *By Bread Alone* (Lester E. Brown, 1974), *The Losing Ground* (Erik P. Eckholm, 1976), *The Causes of World Hunger* (William Byron, 1982), etc. In 1970s and the beginning of 1980s the main concern was “world hunger”. The solution offered was Green Revolution. But, being ignited by the report of the United Nation World Commission on Environment and Development known as Brundtland Commission in 1987, the main topic of discussions at global level has been changed drastically to “sustainable development”. This new topic signified the need of having a broader perspective for

¹ Quoted in Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), p. 263. It can be found also in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Hearth of Matter* (London: Collins, 1978), p. 53.

discussions, debates, dialogs, and collaborations in trying to solve the actual problems within the new global context.

Sustainable development was a new concept popularized by the book published by the Brundtland Commission named “*Our Common Future*” (1987). In this book sustainable development was defined as ‘**development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs**’ (Simon Dresser, 2002). Global discussions and debates related to this new concept arrived at their culmination in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992. Nearly 100 world leaders who met in Brazil signed an agreement for concrete actions named Agenda 21 which signified the commitment for global actions (Daniel Sitarz, 1994).

The question raised through this paper is how far the Catholic Church has been responding the global concern related to the issue of sustainable development echoed by the continuous discussions and debates since the launching of the Brundtland Commission’s report as mentioned above. It has to be said that related to the issue of sustainable development leaders of the Catholic Church preferred to use the concept of solidarity as the expression of interdependence based upon which development should be established and the concept of full development of peoples as the guarantee for the sustaining process of development. These two concepts can be found in almost all social teaching documents of the Catholic Church. Yet, if we want to find an understanding of sustainable development, we can find at least in two social teaching encyclicals written by Pope John Paul II named : *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) and *Centesimus Annus* (1991). Both encyclicals were written as the responses of the Catholic Church to the actual social issues of that time. Although the issue of sustainable development was not discussed explicitly, yet we could find the messages concerning the issue through deeper understanding of the key concept of development.

In the last social teaching encyclical written by Pope Benedict XVI named *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2004) we, all Christians, are invited to find in the social teachings of the Catholic Church the elements of great wisdom that guide us in our involvement in today's burning social issues. Accepting this invitation we can say that Catholic perspective is not only about how to solve the existing problems but also how to be motivated, ignited, or burnt in our heart so that our involvement in the solution of the problems will be sustainable. Catholic perspective is about how to make Catholic faith still relevant and significant in terms of its transformative impact in our today’s world. As stated by Teilhard de Chardin SJ (1978), it is about how to have a new faith. It means that the Catholic perspective should be a kind of adjustable, renewable, transformative, and far reaching faith based perspective.

ARE THESE RESPONSES ENOUGH OR DO WE NEED MORE?

Talking about Catholic perspective related to the social issues of our today’s world, we have to refer to the social teachings of the Catholic Church which can be found in sixteen papal encyclicals. Beginning from *Rerum Novarum*, the papal social encyclical issued on May 1891

till *Sacramentum Caritatis*, the last papal social encyclical issued in 2004, the Catholic perspective had been portrayed as the responses of the Catholic Church to the actual social issues of the modern time. These fifteen papal social encyclicals can be named : *Rerum Novarum* (Leo XIII, 1891), *Quadragesimo Anno* (Pius XI, 1931), *Mater et Magistra* (John XXIII, 1961), *Pacem in Terris* (John XXIII, 1963), *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican Council, 1965), *Populorum Progressio* (Paul VI, 1967), *Octogesima Adveniens* (Paul VI, 1971), *Justice in the World* (Synod of Bishops, 1971), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paul VI, 1975), *Redemptor Hominis* (John Paul II, 1979), *Laborem Exercens* (John Paul II, 1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (John Paul II, 1987), *Centesimus Annus* (John Paul II, 1991), *Tertio Millenio Adveniente* (John Paul II, 1994), *Evangelium Vitae* (John Paul II, 1995), and *Sacramentum Caritatis* (Benedict XVI, 2004).

Various topics have been discussed and some fundamental principles have been emphasized in those encyclicals. The various topics can be categorized into seven key topics : 1) sanctity of human life and dignity of the person, 2) call to family, community, and participation, 3) rights and responsibilities, 4) preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, 5) dignity of work and the rights of workers, 6) solidarity, and 7) care for God's creation. Concerning principles, there are three principles which can be perceived as fundamental. They are : 1) human dignity, 2) solidarity, and 3) subsidiarity. Almost all important aspects of human life have been covered in the social teachings of the Catholic Church. Based on these social teachings the various kinds of Catholic social action have been developed and the Catholic social ethics has been taught in schools and seminaries.

In the middle of 1990s the Union of Superior Generals of Religious Congregations in Rome formed a commission named the International Commission of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation. The commission consisted of promoters of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) representing 50 international Religious Congregations which had been involved in various apostolates in around the world. One of jobs trusted to the commission was to publish a manual for JPIC promoters to help those searching for the how of mission in the context of today's world. After working for 2 years, in June 1997 the manual book was published. It was named Manual of Promoters of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation.

How important is the book? It is a very important book which represented the Catholic way of responding the global issue as well as the openness of the Catholic religious groups to what Teilhard de Chardin SJ called as "the new faith". The reasoning can be given as follows.

First, the Union of Superior Generals of Religious Congregations carried out missions representing a wide range of Catholic actions in today's world. The ways how they carried out the missions, no doubt, are Catholic ways. Being faithful to the Good News and the social teaching of the Catholic Church, they tried to develop their missions on the perspective of responding the signs of the times. This kind of orientation was expressed significantly in the introduction of the book.

Second, it is a long-term social commitment that this manual book wants to develop. It differs from Social Action or Social Ministry practiced by the Catholic Church as charity

works. As a long-term social commitment, JPIC has been expected to become an integral dimension of all ministries and activities of all religious groups in the Catholic Church. Furthermore, it has been expected to become a kind of alternative way of life. Hopefully, it would become concrete witness of the Catholic faith in our today's world.

Third, this manual book had been drafted by involving a group of fifteen JPIC promoters representing all continents (Europe, Africa, Asia, and America) of which diversity of political, economic, cultural, social and religious contexts had been taken into account considerably. The issue had been known as a global issue yet it needed actions at the local level to respond. The actions had to be concrete and implemented continuously. It meant that an inspiring yet practical manual was needed to help promoters in the field choose the right ways of doing.

Besides the above response of the Catholic religious groups, there are various responses from many other Catholic groups. Here, it is worthwhile to mention the response from the Catholic intellectuals represented by Pax Romana ICMICA group. At the Asia Pacific Regional Advocacy Workshop on Human Rights and Sustainable Development, Bali, Indonesia, 22-28, May 2002, Pax Romana ICMICA did address the issue of sustainable development quite thoroughly. This workshop produced a declaration named *Bali Declaration on Human Rights and Ecologically Sustainable Development in the Various Parts of the Asia Pacific Region*. From the vision stated in this declaration we can find a clear picture about the Catholic perspective toward which Pax Romana ICMICA group is trying to put their Catholic faith. It was stated : *“There is no sustainable development without human rights, no human rights without an ethical imperative, and no ethical imperative without a deep spiritual appreciation of our interconnected universe”*.

The above vision statement tells us about not only the ethical worldview but also the direction of the spirituality of the Pax Romana ICMICA group. The term “interconnected universe” reminds us of the similar term “convergent universe” as found in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin SJ². We need to believe that when Christian faith is grown toward this spiritual direction, it will create what is called re-born Christianity. Such a faith can be named as a new faith.

VIEWING THE WORLD AND FINDING POVERTY AS A SCANDAL

In his famous book titled *World Without Borders* (1973) Lester E. Brown wrote these statements: *“We live in an age when problems are increasingly worldwide --- the world food*

² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Heart of Matter*, London: Collins, 1978, p. 52. Quoted: “When all is said and done, I can see this: I managed to climb up to the point where the Universe became apparent to me as a great rising surge, in which all the work that goes into serious enquiry, all the will to create, all the acceptance of suffering, converge ahead into a single dazzling spear-head --- now, at the end of my life, I can stand on the peak I have scaled and continue to look ever more closely into the future, and there, with ever more assurance, see the ascent of God”.

problem, threat of world inflation, world population problem, world environmental crisis, world monetary crisis, world drug problem, and so forth. Few, if any, of mankind's more pressing problems have purely national solutions. They can be solved only through multinational or global cooperation. No country can protect the value of its currency or the health of its people without the extensive cooperation of other countries. Even our daily weather can be influenced by man's activities elsewhere in the world. The earth's ecosystem will continue to support human life only if countries can cooperate to eventually limit the discharge of waste materials."

The above statements opened the eyes of many NGOs activists and political leaders in the world so that many mass movements were initiated. Some of them can be named such as : Active Non Violence Movement, Civil Society Movement, Better World Movement, Global Justice Movement, Global Citizens Movement, etc. Many kinds of forum at global level were established to respond the existing problems. We can name some important world forums which used to meet regularly such as : United Nations Conference, G20 Summit, G8 Meeting, OECD World Forum, Economic World Forum, Social World Forum, World Energy Forum, World News Forum, Justice World Forum, The Council's World Water Forum, etc.

One of many important world forums was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992 as mentioned above. This world forum through its Agenda 21 did create new awareness, new global movements, and new global initiatives which were able to change the picture of world poverty. During that time there were about 1.5 billion people or 26.3 % of total world population : 5.7 billion living in poverty. Most of them lived in the developing world. After 16 years, in 2009 the number of those poor people decreased to about 1.2 billion or 17.9% of total world population which is 6.7 billion. Although the absolute number doesn't show significant change, yet the relative number tells us something. Agenda 21 as a plan of global actions did work. To achieve the 2015 international development target as set at the United Nations Millenium Summit which is halving the number of people living in poverty, much more effort is still needed.

How should the Catholic faith respond to the new awareness, new global movements, and new global initiatives taken through world forums as described above? This question can be answered by reflecting on the following message :

*"The mystery of the Eucharist inspires and impels us to work courageously within our world to bring about that renewal of relationships which has its inexhaustible source in God's gift. The prayer which we repeat at every Mass: "Give us this day our daily bread," **obliges us to do everything possible, in cooperation with international, state and private institutions, to end or at least reduce the scandal of hunger and malnutrition afflicting so many millions of people in our world, especially in developing countries.** In a particular way, the Christian laity, formed at the school of the Eucharist, are called to assume their specific political and social responsibilities. To do so, they need to be adequately prepared through **practical education in charity and justice.** To this end, the Synod considered it necessary for Dioceses and Christian communities to teach and promote the Church's social doctrine. (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*,2004).*

The above message is a message coming from the depth of the Catholic faith. It helps Catholic people to see hunger, malnutrition, or poverty as a scandal. It is a scandal for the whole human family. It is a scandal for God Himself. Any effort especially in the area of international cooperation and practical education in charity and justice must be chosen to eradicate the scandal. The two strategic areas might not be the best areas of strategy but both are the most familiar areas where the Catholic Church used to put her effort. For the present moment of the 1.2 billion poor people, around 700 million are living in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. It means that the scandal can be localized mostly in these two places where the Catholic Church can concentrate her effort.

RE-IMAGINING CHRISTIAN MISSION : “HAVING MORE JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION FOR THE SAKE OF SUSTAINABILITY”

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola emphasizes the importance of having what is called “*compositio loci*” = composition of place before entering into a contemplation. The composition of place can be any kind of imagination and re-imagination of God’s creative works in the world where all human beings are called to take active participation. Teilhard de Chardin’s concept of convergent universe seems to be a kind of composition of place based on which he developed his intellectual re-imagination about the integrity of God’s creation as the whole context for all human enterprises. It became a kind of continuous spiritual fruit of his being “*contemplativus in actione*” = contemplative in action in doing serious enquiry in his researches, developing evolution theory, stimulating more creative thinking, and carrying out all kinds of scientific work including the acceptance of the suffering.

In response to the issue of sustainable development, the Catholic perspective should be able to bring the various groups within the Catholic Church to have one mission through which they can work together easily and joyfully. This mission should be attractive and inclusive enough to invite people from other religious traditions to collaborate toward the same goal. The question is : How can it be constructed? The JPIC promoters of the Union of Superior Generals of Religious Congregations in Rome seem to have mission which fits the characteristics required. This group constructed their mission based on their imagination about Jesus Christ as our incarnated God. He is God who said “yes” to the world. We can imagine Him as God-for-people who is still creating the universe. His creation is still going on. The universe He decided to create is not completed yet. He needs our active participation to complete it. But, Jesus Christ is also God who said “no” to things scandalous to Him such as: injustice, oppression, poverty, discrimination, violence, destruction of environment, etc. This kind of God is not only continuing to create but also continuing to do redemption. Here we can find Jesus Christ as God who is carrying in Himself the mystery of Creation, Incarnation, and Redemption.

The JPIC promoters of the Union of Superior Generals of Religious Congregations in Rome know very well that they have very close partners in carrying out the JPIC mission. Their

close partners are the members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) who promulgated the same mission at their Vancouver assembly in 1983. In the beginning the WCC members chose the phrase JPIC not as a name for their mission statement but as a shorthand for naming their program priority. Later, at Canberra assembly in 1991 the JPIC became the central vision of the WCC and its member churches as shown in this following statement :*”Working towards justice, peace and the integrity of creation will help the churches understand their task in the world, provided we develop a rigorous social analysis, deepen our theological reflection and vigorously promote these concerns. This has emerged as the central vision of the WCC and its member churches.”* (D. Preman Niles, 2003). Here we can conclude that JPIC mission is no more the exclusive mission of the Catholic groups. It has become a Christian mission opened for collaboration with whoever wants to be part of it.

CLOSING REMARK

Although the JPIC promoters of the Union of Superior Generals of Religious Congregations in Rome have been able to go so far in trying to respond the issue of sustainable development and developing a broader range of collaborations, yet their strategies and programs are still based on anthropocentric approach. This approach has been criticized by the deep ecologists as embodying the essential arrogance of humanism which views the nonhuman world purely as a means to human ends (Warwick Fox, 2003). Sustainability itself is still something questionable. Who knows, it might be ended soon (Simon Dresner, 2002). Anyway, there is still a very long road which we have to travel together. The discussions and debates related to the issue of sustainable development still need more enlightenment. One thing we might need to consider that to make it enlightening, the Catholic perspective should be a kind of adjustable, renewable, transformative, far reaching, and faith based perspective.

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