

STUDI

CONTRIBUTIONS

The content of this paper was presented on the occasion of the Asia-Pacific Dominican Family Training on the Salamanca Process and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which was held over March 7-13, 2020 at the De Meester Residence, St. Theresa's College, in Quezon City (Philippines).

The topic I was asked to address today will be developed according to the following outline:

1. A brief introduction to CST, describing its nature and method, and how the «social question» at its core has evolved in time.
2. A focus on the most recent CST related to human development, particularly looking at three documents, namely the social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) by Pope Benedict, the fourth chapter of the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) and the latest social encyclical *Laudato si'* (2015) by Pope Francis.
3. An illustration of the scope of the SDGs by describing in brief their origin and purpose.
4. Highlighting some points of convergence and shared objectives between CST and SDGs, opening a space for dialogue. This section is an attempt to point out how the SDGs are one expression – directly or indirectly – of some principles upheld also by CST.
5. Conclusion. Some «shared» values drawn from the previous reflection can help formulate an «ethical framework» conducive to integral human development.

1. A brief introduction to Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

CST belongs to the field of moral theology as exemplified by John Paul II in his social encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987). The Pope describes CST as «the accurate formulation of the results of a careful reflection on the complex realities of human existence» (41). Through CST the Church presents her response to the ethical questions raised over time by and

concerning human societies. CST interprets the moral values of social activities and offers guiding principles – *not* technical solutions¹ – consistent with the evangelical vision of human life. It is «theologically inspired» and «socially realistic» as the Canadian Jesuit sociologist Hervé Carrier (1993) specified, thus being characterized by two essential elements:

- One of *continuity*, based upon the Gospel and love for all human beings, upon the fundamental goodness of human nature and the individual journey toward God.
- One of *variable application* to the needs and conditions of society that change throughout history, and, in today's society, even more rapidly.

Within this context, the three traditional orienting factors of CST are: (1) *principles* for reflection, in order to observe and evaluate a certain situation, (2) *criteria* for *judgement* and assessment of the same situation, and finally (3) *guidelines* for *action*, in order to change and improve the status quo.²

At the heart of the social teaching of the Church lies the so-called «social question», which has stirred more deeply the commitment of the Church to offer a doctrinal and systematic answer to the human and social problems caused by the industrial revolution in the modern world. In the late 1800s, profound changes (*res novae*) were brought about by the growth of capitalism, the mechanization and the transformation of the production process. These changes affected the lives of masses of individuals (and families) who found themselves in conditions of extreme poverty and precariousness. Because he saw many situations of injustice and imbalance, Pope Leo XIII issued the well-known first social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. This marked the beginning of the Church's «formal» commitment to speak on social matters in order to contribute to the restoration of a moral

order consistent with the unfolding of Christian Revelation in human history.

Precisely in light of the historical dimension of salvation history, it must be emphasized here that the «social question» has changed over time under the effects of cultural, social, political and economic transformations. Sorge (2017), in particular, has identified four different phases in its evolution:

- 1) The first phase (1891-1931) is exemplified by a class conflict between «owners» and «proletarians», or conflict between two ideologies, «liberalism» and «socialism», which is essentially identifiable with the «labour question».
- 2) The second phase (1931-1958) is marked by the conflict between two different political-economic organizations, a conflict that arises from the juxtaposition of two socioeconomic systems, as well as two ways of production: «capitalism» and «communism», the latter being also particularly hostile to religion. The capitalistic model, however, has also shown some evident weaknesses after the crisis of '29, requiring corrective state intervention and breaking trust in the effectiveness of the market mechanism (and the Smithian *invisible hand*).
- 3) The third phase (1958-1978) sees the social conflict intensifying due to spreading inequalities and an increasing developmental gap between the North and the South of the world. The «social question» assumes «planetary» dimensions. World globalization processes begin and interdependency grows, together with human instability and imbalance. Inequity in terms of distribution and consumption prevents peace and social harmony.
- 4) The fourth phase (from 1978 onwards) is shaped by profound cultural changes in the vision of the human being. The «social question» is no longer merely quantitative, but touches upon the

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Rafaella Petrini

«quality of life». Imbalances affect human existence and fundamental human rights. Shared ethical principles, therefore, are looked for in order to establish a new «humanism». In this phase, the important contribution of other scientific disciplines to CST is recognized and upheld, in an effort to promote dialogue, exchange and the growth of knowledge.

2. Focus on the most recent CST

As Benedict XVI clearly states, «We need to affirm today that *the social question has become a radically anthropological question*» (CIV 75), touching upon – among other aspects – the way human life is manipulated and transformed by technology. This brings back to one's attention the deeper meaning of human development, its ultimate end and its process as a social value. My task here is to reflect very briefly upon the contribution on this topic offered by three more recent documents of the Church's magisterium: the two latest social encyclicals *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) and *Laudato Si'* (2015), and Chapter 4 of the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013:176-258), dedicated to «*The Social Dimension of Evangelization*».

Taking as a point of departure the well-known definition of «complete» and «authentic» development given by Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* (1967), as development of each man and of the whole man, which cannot be separated from the civilization in which it takes place (14),³ *Caritas in Veritate* (2009) reiterates that such development «*concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension*» (29), including non-utility related goods as an integral part of the common good and consistent with the extension of the informational basis of welfare promoted by current economics and especially by those economists upholding the «social choice theory» (Marzano 2011). Development is multidimensional, for *salus* (salvation) is a matter of «bodily health» and wellbeing together with «spiritual health» (Rowlands 2019); it is universal and integral insofar as it concerns the human person in all his or her dimensions: personal and social, spiritual and corporeal, historical and transcendent (CSDC 2004: 38).

Integral human development must include a growth dimension, more easily measured by a quantitative index as GDP, but also the socio-relational and spiritual

dimensions of human existence, more difficult to quantify but also more closely connected to man's «higher needs», in Maslow's terms.⁴

Among some key points underlined by *Caritas in Veritate*, Zamagni (2019) emphasizes:

- the amplification of the notion of «social justice» so as to include the *production* process besides the process of *distribution*, for both processes must preserve human rights, respect the dignity of the human being and promote morality;
- the adoption of the principle of «fraternity» – beyond solidarity – as a regulating principle of the economic order;
- the introduction of the logic of «gratuitousness» (superabundance) above justice (equivalence), because human sociability can be lived and experienced even in economics and economic life.

Besides necessary human rights and duties, a critical role is played by the principle of «gratuitousness» as an expression of fraternity, which must be then translated into solidarity (CIV 34). As Benedict XVI points out, «Gratuitousness is already present in our lives in many different forms» (idem). The logic of gratuitousness is based upon the reality of «gift», a reality upon which life in the Universe unfolds and operates.

The central virtue that promotes integral human development and enhances one's capacity to give and receive, is charity. This is at the heart of CST because «it gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with neighbour» (CIV 2). It becomes a shaping principle for micro-relationships as well macro-relationships (CIV 2). It is recognized as «an authentic expression of humanity» (CIV 3) and, in turn, as the way to pursue «development goals that possess a more humane and humanizing value» (CIV 9). Charity from this perspective is active and operational within society; it is a good that, instead of decreasing, increases in its use, according to the logic of «gratuitousness» and superabundance (Rowlands 2019). It is precisely this dynamic of charity received and given that «gives rise to the Church's social teaching, which is *caritas in veritate in re sociali*» (CIV 5).

Charity placed at the heart of CST implies the recognition of development as ultimately man's vocation, which requires man's free choice in response to

it.⁵ Moreover, this vocation is not only an individual journey, but a path to walk together. That is why Benedict XVI emphasizes the notion that «thinking of this kind requires a deeper critical evaluation of the category of relation» (CIV 53), because the human creature is defined *through* interpersonal relations and is called to live them more authentically.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), particularly in its fourth Chapter dedicated to the social dimension of evangelization, outlines some practical guidelines for living charity in the social context. One very concrete way to practice charity and foster what Francis defines as «habits of solidarity» (EG 189) is to build more inclusive markets and welfare systems, through education, healthcare and work for all (EG 192). This implies overcoming neo-utilitarian economic doctrine, so that the dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good can shape all economic policies (EG 203). A clear sign of the fact that society is indeed oriented to pursue the common good is given when politics and politicians are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor (EG 205). Consequently, Francis calls for a wider practice of social dialogue within states, within society, and with other believers (EG 238). Within this frame of mind, care for eradicating new forms of poverty and vulnerability becomes, in fact, a primary concern (EG 210).

The latest social encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) builds upon the previous papal teaching by proposing a renewed «appeal» to the human family to seek «a sustainable and integral development» (13), considering that human existence is grounded in «three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships» (66): with God, with our neighbor, with the earth – our «common home». The Pope makes reference to «sustainable development», recognizing implicitly the multidimensional reality of sustainability that the international community has also identified as social, economic and environmental (UN 2005).

Francis' social encyclical emphasizes in a particular way a common responsibility that the political community is called to assume for the good of all: the protection of the environment (CSDC 451-487). Indeed, this represents a challenge for all humanity: the duty – common and universal – to respect a collective good according to the principle of the «universal destination of goods».

Such a common and universal duty is exercised in a responsible way when human interventions on nature are implemented so as to respect order, beauty and the utility and function of every living being within the ecosystem. When this orientation is not observed we must live with the consequences of what is happening to our «common home», as well described in *Laudato Si'* (17-42): various forms of pollution, climate changes, exhaustion of resources, loss of biodiversity, as well as the spreading of a «throwaway culture» which affects both material things (waste) and human beings (exclusion).

Pope Francis speaks of the existence of a state of «global inequality» (LS 48), since not only is it true that «the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together», but the deterioration of the environment and societies mainly affect the weakest on the planet. For this reason, a true ecological approach – Francis says – always becomes a social approach which must listen to «both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor» (LS 49). To deal with this process, he also indicates some lines of action (LS 163-219), including the promotion of a renewed international dialogue; the formulation of necessary multilateral agreements; the constitution of a *super partes* world political authority, which would be the bearer of everyone's interests; a radical change in lifestyles, especially in the most opulent societies; transparency in decision-making processes, which reduces corruption and the harmful consequences of crony capitalism;⁶ an «ecological conversion» that must occur at every level, primarily in organizing the production of goods and services, and the establishment of «community networks» (LS 219) that promote solidarity, respect and fraternity.

These lines of action are also meant to counteract the «technocratic ideology» which both Paul VI and Benedict XVI regard as a «great danger» of our age, for it can lead mankind to entrust the entire process of development to technology alone, without proper direction (PP 34, CIV 14). In *Laudato si'* Francis speaks of the greater threat of the «technocratic paradigm» (106-114). Technology and its rapid development have become an «undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm» (LS 106) that lead men to attempt to extract everything possible from things, while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of them. The «technocratic paradigm» exalts the concept of a subject gaining control over and



being able to manipulate another external object, possessing it, mastering it and transforming it by using technique, logical and rational procedures.

The modern «great danger» is that this «epistemological paradigm» shapes – sometimes unconsciously – the life of individuals and the workings of society, by being applied to relationships and living beings, that is to say, to the «three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships» previously mentioned: with the Transcendence, the fellow members of our human family and the environment.

This attitude upholds a philosophical tendency towards «modern anthropocentrism», a way of thinking of modern man that has paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality. Connected to this tendency is an approach that also misguides lifestyles, by applying a logic of practical relativism that sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one's own immediate interests and convenience (LS 122; EG 80). Therefore, Francis calls

for a time to pay renewed attention to reality and the limits it imposes (LS 115-116), a time to choose ethical principles that must give technological development a direction and a purpose consistent with the dignity of human life.

Since Francis stresses that «everything is closely interrelated» (LS 137), he also calls forth for a greater vision in approaching the problems of today's world, taking into account every aspect of a much more global crisis that affects humanity. If ecology as a science studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop, Francis speaks of «integral ecology» as a broader, more integral vision of reality, relationships, interactions and interconnectedness among different dimensions of human existence: environmental, economic, social, cultural, day-to-day life. If everything is related, then the health of a society's institutions has also relevant consequences – present and future – for the environment and the quality of human life (LS 142).

3. The scope of the SDGs

The formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals by the international community through the United Nations is seen here as an expression of the work of global «community networks», or better as the fruit of «social dialogue» oriented towards the pursuit of the common good. It is, therefore, considered a concrete attempt to foster a type of development that goes beyond mere technological and economic growth and rather intends to achieve a more integral human development as previously defined. It is, finally, a more global approach to sustainable development that implies at least some elements of that notion of «integral ecology» we described above, recognizing implicitly that interconnectedness calls for solidarity and mutual care.

Some well-known economists have publicly stated that the SDGs are presently the closest tool we have to reach this type of inclusive, global development and the encyclical *Laudato Si'* offers a parallel positive program for global development.⁷

The SDGs were elaborated out of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, which wishes to provide «a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now

and into the future». The 2030 Agenda thus acknowledges the three-dimensional reality of sustainability as previously mentioned (economic, social and environmental), but also indirectly recognizes the interrelation among the themes of peace, justice and the preservation of creation (LS 92).⁸

Without exploring in detail each of the 17 Goals, it seems meaningful to report here the general objectives the participants pursued as reported in the Agenda 2030, since they signify a very broad plan of action in various areas:

- *People*: to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.
- *Planet*: to protect it from degradation through sustainable consumption and production, by sustainably managing its natural resources and taking action on climate change, in order to support the needs of the present and future generations.
- *Prosperity*: to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.
- *Peace*: to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence, for there can be no

sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

- *Partnership*: to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

The 17 Goals are to promote a type of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This type of development, in order to be truly reached, also requires the close collaboration and participation of all parties involved.

4. Points of convergence

Bernardito Auza, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, issued an important *Note* on the occasion of the First Anniversary of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals on October 5, 2016. In his statement, he reiterated general appreciation of the Holy See for the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which Pope Francis, in his address to the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 de-



scribed as «an important sign of hope». Here I will try to focus more specifically on those aspects that constitute «common» goals shared by CST in its ultimate orientation to *see, judge and act*.

First of all, by formulating global solutions for global problems the SDGs depart from the shared assumption that human well-being is multifaceted and is comprised of many different aspects and dimensions of economic and social life, including health; material living standards (income, consumption and wealth); education; personal activities including work; political voice and governance; social connections and relationships; environmental present and future conditions; security (economic as well as a physical). Consequently, development must also be multifaceted and related to the various dimensions of the human existence.

Moreover, the interconnection and integrated nature of the SDGs, considered of crucial importance by the United Nations, reflects somehow the interconnect-edness of the many dimensions of human life on earth as expressed in *Laudato Si'* and in the concept of «integral ecology» as defined by Francis. The need to face together the problem of «global inequality» requires a more inclusive economy pursued by the Agenda 2030, open to incorporate ethical principles in both phases of production and distribution of goods and services, so that it can truly allow human flourishing.

The fight against poverty and hunger engaged by the SDGs presupposes a weakened trust in the positive effects of the work of the «invisible hand» of the market and a greater awareness of the need to implement processes and mechanisms that are geared towards a better distribution of income and labor. This approach offers us some space for bringing back to operation the logic of «gift» and the principle of gratuitousness in the public sphere as promoted by some economists (Zamagni 2019).

A special concern for the poor, central to CST, is the initial impetus for the establishment of the SDGs and the pledge «to leave no one behind» which is at the heart of the Agenda 2030. Such concern is also a reflection of the common acknowledgement that inequality is indeed «the root of social ills» and of the shared urge that «the need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed» (EG 202). This attitude fosters «habits of solidarity» (EG 189) that can change structures and discourages bad habits of consumption, counteracting

«the throwaway culture» (LS 16) which affects the excluded and the entire planet.

The interlinkages of the SDGs, besides reaffirming the interconnection of our globalized society, do require «partnership for goals», that is, walking together «the path of dialogue» (EG 238), with states, society and cultures, in order to promote integral human development and pursue the common good. «Social dialogue», therefore, becomes a concrete contribution to peace as encouraged by Francis, by favoring new forms of exchange and encounter. International co-operation necessary to achieve the SDGs promotes a type of development that cannot be realized without incorporating and respecting personal, social, economic, and political human rights. International cooperation encompasses greater collaboration to care for our «common home, that is to preserve» our fundamental relationship with the environment, as another integral aspect of searching together for «a genuine path to peace » (EG 221), which is a necessary condition to achieve the common good.

Before closing this paragraph focused on «common» goals, it is important to underline that in his *Note* Bernardito Auza also pointed out some reservations especially concerning some specific targets of the SDGs (i.e., 3.7: access to sexual and reproductive health services and 5.6: access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights), but also some concepts and definitions adopted in the agreement that would not be completely consistent with CST and require a more extensive reflection. A primary difference in approach which should be recalled here lies in the use of the notion of «sustainable» – in its tridimensional nature as described before – versus «integral», which presupposes not only the protection of the right to life – from birth to natural death – but also a fundamental openness to a spiritual reality, implying the right to religious freedom, and the acknowledgement of the existence of God as Creator, from whom every creature is dependent and in whom every creature finds fulfillment.

5. Conclusion

To turn away from the feeling that the fight against the challenges related to «global inequality» is overwhelming, it may be useful to start to think of each challenge as a set of concrete problems that, once properly identified and understood, can be solved one at a time (Baner-

jee and Duflo 2012). The SDGs represent a very concrete attempt to move in this direction.

Nevertheless, before the threat posed by the «technocratic paradigm» and its logic of manipulation and exploitation, one of the first challenges would seem to propose an alternative «paradigm» of approach. CST and the contribution of the SDGs towards a more integral development of peoples offer some basic principles for outlining a different «epistemological paradigm» centered on «care». Among the configuring elements of this paradigm is first and foremost the recognition that the human being is a fundamentally «dependent» being: as a being in relation and dependent on others – and to the Other in openness to Transcendence. This recognition naturally strengthens bonds of fraternity, acknowledges common rights and upholds the vision of belonging to one single family.

Dependence and vulnerability are an inescapable part of everyone's life, leading each one of us to recognize more consciously that throughout our human existence we *all* are – at different times – «subjects» and «objects» of care. This awareness in some way «forces» every member of the human family to «weave networks of charity» (CIV 5) through subsidiarity, because caring for fragility becomes an integral aspect of the common good. Moreover, caring for fragility not only fosters solidarity among peoples, but also a greater intergenerational and intragenerational solidarity (LS 159-162), which is a key factor of sustainability.

Caring for fragility shall thus be pursued as «a practice and a value» (Held 2006), that is to say as a response to the needs of the other – between people who share an interest in their mutual well-being – but also as an expression of «*caring relations*» (Held 2006; Brotto 2013) that help bring people closer to one another, to build relationships of trust, unity, reciprocity, to promote the moral growth of individuals beyond a mere sense of justice, both personally and communally. This approach challenges individuals to change their personal lifestyles vis-à-vis the throwaway culture.

This ethical paradigm of care understood as «a practice and a value» finds a strong resonance in the current pontificate of Francis, who openly supports a «culture of care» permeating all of society (LS 231). It suffices to think of the image of the Church as a «field hospital» often used by the Holy Father, of his primary criterion of «mercy» and «poverty» in all

pastoral work,⁹ of his emphasis on «tenderness» and «care for all that exists».

Furthermore, in his address to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 25 November 2014, Francis explicitly reminded the Parliament members that they are «called to a great mission although it may seem useless», that is, to take care of «the fragility of peoples». This attention to fragility, which must always remain open to Transcendence, allows us – says the Pope – to overcome the «throwaway culture» and put the dignity of the person back at the core of any decision, beyond the trends and powers of the moment.

In this perspective, sensitivity to «care» – necessary for all individuals without distinction – can become a catalyst for fraternity and reciprocity; it can strengthen a «spirituality of global solidarity» (LS 240); it can constitute a possible answer to that dilemma of modernity which Bauman (2016) refers to as the crucial choice between the competition of the individual or the solidarity of the human family, which presupposes – maybe surprisingly for some – that all men and women not only can live together in a more collaborative way, but can also strive for greater happiness.

Abbreviations

CIV	Encyclical Letter <i>Caritas in Veritate</i>
CST	Catholic Social Teaching
CSDC	<i>Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church</i>
DPIHD	Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
EG	Apostolic Exhortation <i>Evangelii Gaudium</i>
LS	Encyclical Letter <i>Laudato Si'</i>
PP	Encyclical Letter <i>Populorum Progressio</i>
UN	United Nations

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NOTE

¹ As reiterated also by Benedict XVI in *Caritas in veritate* (9): «The Church does not have technical solutions to offer and does not claim «to interfere in any way in the politics of States». She does, however, have a mission of truth to accomplish, in every time and circumstance, for a society that is attuned to man, to his dignity, to his vocation. [...] Fidelity to man requires fidelity to the truth, which alone is the guarantee of freedom (cf. Jn 8:32) and of the possibility of integral human development. [...] This mission of truth is something that the Church can never renounce».

² In his social encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961: 236), John XXIII speaks of «three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice».

³ Reference is made here to Fr. Louis-Joseph Lebre, OP (1897–1966).

⁴ Here reference is made to the well-known hierarchy of needs proposed by the American psychologist Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper «A Theory of Human Motivation», published in *Psychological Review* 50 (4): 370–96.

⁵ The notion of progress as human vocation is introduced by Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* (15-17), and again by Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* (16-19).

⁶ On this topic, see the research work of Angus Deaton (2013), Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2015.

⁷ This statement is freely transcribed from a contribution of the American economist J.Sachs at the Seminar organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate* that took place in Vatican City on December 3, 2019.

⁸ Here reference is also made to the Pastoral Letter *Sobre la relación del hombre con la naturaleza* issued by the Conference of Dominican Bishops on 21 January 1987.

⁹ Reference here is made to the Annual Lonergan Lecture offered by V. Danna at the Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome) on November 15, 2019: «Papa Francesco e Lonergan: orizzonti per il futuro del Cristianesimo».