

**Asian Convention
Vatican II in the Context of Globalisation
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Greg Lopez: Vatican Council II & Development¹

1. Integral human development

The church's concern for the consolidation of "citizenship, social and international justice with special attention placed on measures in favour of underdeveloped peoples" (Pope Paul VI's first message to the world, 22 June 1963) appears in numerous documents, discourses and encyclicals. Vatican II, influenced by the development of the 60s, formed an optimistic and lineal vision of progress, enshrined the term "human and integral" development as an answer to the dominant thinking that was based on an economic and utilitarian vision of the human person. (*This is an important point when it comes to determining how policies are analysed*)

This guiding principle opens the third chapter of the document, "Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World" *Gaudium et Spes* (GS). It states, "**man is the author, centre and end of all economic-social life**". Vatican II no doubt believed in technical and economic progress. Nevertheless, in an effort to temper its discourse, it realistically presented growing inequality:

"While immense masses lack basic necessities, some people, even some people in the less developed nations, live in opulence without consideration. Luxury abounds together with misery. And while some possess the power to make decisions, many lack all initiative and responsibility, frequently living and working in conditions unworthy of the human person" (cf. *ibid.* n. 63c).

The council also sought to give development an ethical and Christian vision by taking as the starting-point, human beings in an integral and total manner. The Christian concept of development offered here is part of an anthropological dynamic: The global vision of the human being, centre of creation, conceived as that vocation of God that invites all people to move forward toward their own progress (*Populorum progressio*, n. 15). It is an integral development of individuals and society, which implies personal development and the growth of society and all humankind. Personal development and collective, societal growth are correlative dimensions.

Populorum Progressio explains some basic steps of this development. They are keys that are still valid today:

¹ Vatican II and Development, a short discussion paper presented at "Vatican II in the Context of Globalisation", Asian Convention on 40th Anniversary of the Second Vatican Council (1962-2002), 8-11 October 2002, Bangkok, Thailand - Lay Contribution to the Church and the World.

- "Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth" (n. 14);
- "To be authentic it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man. It must take into account all the dimensions of the person and not be limited to satisfying basic material needs, but the most profound aspirations of the person and all people" (n. 14);
- "The desire to possess more is creating a mass of excluded and marginalized peoples, while some swim in abundance" (cf. n. 19);
- "Authentic development ... is ... the transition from less human conditions to those which are more human" (n. 20).

In this way the dynamic and human character of development is highlighted.

A great deal has been written about the Third World and how "a few people possess a great deal, while many others have nothing", and how "the luxury of some is an insult to the misery of the vast majorities". We have talked about and repeated with insistence and pain "the growth of impoverishment and extreme misery". These and many other expressions continue to be a challenge that humankind must resolve.

Revolutions and wars have erupted with the aim of creating greater human development. Many have fought to break the evil cycle of misery, marginality, to bring reforms and transformations. Pain and blood have watered the lands of the Third World and yet underdevelopment and hunger, unspeakable misery and death continue to affect the vast majority of people. This has been the history of the last half of the 20th century and we are entering the 21st century with a major issue pending: *development of humanity*.

2. Development through solidarity

A new term in society's conscience, in political discourse and at the roots of Christian thinking is solidarity. Vatican II presents solidarity, which is born in the radical communion of God with humanity through Jesus, as a sign of our times that must be lived and promoted by all Christians.

2.1 Solidarity and justice

Vatican II promotes solidarity vigorously. Solidarity cannot remain only as the good will of people, groups or nations. It is a demand for justice that requires profound changes in individuals and peoples. On the one hand, it is aimed at solidarity through assistance that rich nations should provide developing nations. It is also *social justice*, which means changing the unjust commercial relationship between strong and weak nations. At the same time it is a demand for *universal charity*, which means promoting a more just world for all where everyone must give and receive, and where progress of one person does not become an obstacle for others (GS, nn. 43-44). Solidarity, justice and charity are interrelated and essential dimensions of the human being, and without them there cannot be true development.

The obligations called for by solidarity cannot remain only on the level of states and nations. It is most effective through the conscience and personal commitment of people. Personal responses are necessary, but they are insufficient when the relationships between people are unjust. These proposals, made more than 30 years ago, continue to be valid

today. The poor of this world and the underdeveloped nations will not be able to shake off their misery if privileged peoples, groups and nations are unable to contribute to the just development of everyone. I suppose to those who want to respond to the historic will of God will discover a new path, which means contributing to the good of all by making the path to solidarity a reality. It is a demand for justice, a call from God in today's world.

2.2 Solidarity and compassion

How do we relate solidarity to development? Pope John Paul II, defines solidarity as "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 responsible for all" (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 38).

Authentic development cannot exist without solidarity between people and nations (*This must be emphasised all the time*). The most important element of solidarity — the most provocative because of its contrast to the way we live in our world — *is to feel a responsibility for all people*. In this sense, development takes on universal dimensions and we all become responsible for the life and well-being of all people. Development cannot exist for the few while the vast majority remain in misery. Furthermore, we can state that this kind of development is the expression of a lack of solidarity and the injustice of a few who, interested in wealth and power, are the cause of the drama lived by the vast majority. (*This was the challenge and still is the challenge – what can we do differently or what should we do to make this a reality*).

Solidarity as an inherent dimension of authentic development implies an attitude of compassion, of understanding and taking part in the suffering and problems that afflict others. It is not an ephemeral understanding, but an *attitude* that demands that we be aware of the misery suffered by so many, be touched by it, and extend a hand to help them struggle to break free of misery.

3. The myth of economic growth

The accelerated and triumphant technical development that we have witnessed in the last half of this century has created in the hearts and minds of people the dream of unlimited and undefined growth. There is no limit to the possibilities of humankind's progress and technology drags people toward an unstoppable and *limitless level of competition (should we find new economic thinking to address economic issues)*. Each year countries must show higher rates of production of goods and services. This is how developed, developing and underdeveloped countries are measured. It is the myth of progress and uninterrupted and limitless growth.

Nevertheless, the documents produced by the church and international development institutions call attention to the risks of this spiral, placing attention instead on the human being. The earth is sick and under threat. The most threatened being is the poor person, whose basic needs are not met. Other species face the same threats. In three long centuries, 16th through the 19th centuries, a species disappeared every 10 years. Today, one species disappears each day. The logic of the productive and super-technical machine is leading creation toward irreversible situations for nature and human life: global warming, desertification, deforestation, infant mortality, undernourishment, poverty, etc.

The dream of unlimited growth unleashes destructive and annihilating forces that produce mortal diseases for the earth and the species that inhabit it. New paradigms of development are necessary. *The question then is; is the laity responding or can the laity respond?*

Until today human beings have been seen as the absolute master of creation — "dominate the earth and subject it" seems to be the unquestioned mandate. The earth has been handed over to be built and torn down, constructed and transformed at whim in the name of progress. The human being is the captain of this boat, which is creation, and has the absolute freedom to pilot it to any port he or she sees fit. There are no waves or calls for life that stop this or limits its self-sufficiency.

The time has come for complaints to be heard: nature is resisting, quality of life is declining, human relationships are becoming more competitive and aggressive, the relationships between nations are tense and unequal. It seems necessary for us to open ourselves to other paradigms if we want development to be for all people. The environment is a framework of life for all people and for nature itself. All people and creation as a whole need to be seen through the perspective of respectful interdependence and as part of a relationship capable of creating the vital conditions and equilibrium necessary for life. Development today needs to revise its very concept of the human being and take the environment into account.

4. Development and ecology

In a context of crisis within the development paradigm — as seen from the western categories of efficiency, growth and progress at all costs — indigenous and the poor peoples teach us that true development cannot occur if we destroy nature in the process. They provoke us to once more reread the Bible with new eyes and from the perspective of a totality of human being and nature.

4.1 Rescuing the earth

Faith in creation leads us to affirm that the cosmos is stronger than chaos and that the earth is good, the home/place of all humanity. All things — plants, animals and human beings — are perfect because they are God's creation. The dignity of the earth, respect for it and rational use of it, are indispensable conditions for the advent of a true development that signifies a communion-alliance between the human being and the earth.

4.2 First the universe, then the human being

God is the author of the cosmos and human beings have the responsibility of being the administrators of it and not its master. Development should stem from the conviction of human beings as administrators of this project, which is greater than and predates them. Unity between human beings and the rest of creation is an important step in changing the idea that people were put on earth to dominate nature.

4.3 The poor: the key to development

Ecology, as an element of development, demands respect for the riches of the earth and its goods. The poor, on the other hand, demand attention to their basic needs, which, in many cases, cannot be satisfied without destroying nature. Development should search for a great social justice that guarantees life and elemental dignity. From this basic level of social justice, of more equitable relationships between people and peoples, we should be able to achieve ecological justice in relation between human beings and nature. In other words, we cannot provide defence and protection of nature until the poor are able to satisfy their basic needs.

4.4 This world does not belong to us.

The predominant idea in all development processes has been that of the human being as the centre of everything. This must change. The cosmos, all of creation, has its own identity and meaning, which is found in God. Everything belongs to the earth and the universe, and human beings are part of this and belong to it. Earth does not belong to humankind, but the opposite. The affirmation that the "human being is the measure of all things" violates the first law of the universe, which says that we are part of an immense cosmic and planetary community and that we must live in harmony and solidarity with others because we are interdependent, we have the same origin and the same ending.

When we are aware that we are part of all creation, that we live side-by-side and not above everything else, then development will be able to understand nature and its riches, which are for all people.

5. New models of cooperation

Are lay movements still a force to be reckoned with? Yes, I believe we definitely are. Are we effective, are we growing in influence or declining? Do we need new models of cooperation to ensure that in this globalised world, we are still and always relevant?

I find an interesting model of cooperation in CIDSE². No doubt it finds difficulty in coordinating the interest of its various members but I'm sure its successes are far greater than its failures. However, can we find new ways to cooperate, in the CIDSE model on a global scale, with true solidarity (*as defined above*), sharing and sacrificing, and driven by the needs of the most persecuted individuals?

CIDSE is an outpouring from the developments of Vatican II. Can we create new ideas from this conference 40 years later?

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² International Co-operation for Development and Solidarity (www.cidse.org)