

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TRADITION: AN OVERVIEW FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE POOR AND THE MARGINALIZED

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In this paper, the Catholic social tradition (CST) is read in the light of emerging challenges of modern capitalism, which accentuate the struggles and pains of the poor and marginalized in society. The CST provides a rich resource of principles and pastoral actions that prioritize the needs of those victimized by new forms of inequality. The task of deploying CST to address the needs of those in the margins of society necessitates a hermeneutic mediation that utilizes a “normativity of the future” approach in the reading of Scripture, which opens up alternative visions of social order inspired by the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus. Rooted in this Gospel imperative to realize the Kingdom, emphasis on the concerns of the poor in society grew slowly within the CST, particularly in the magisterial teaching of the popes. At present, the body of teaching forwards principles and values hinged on the fundamental dignity of the human person and human rights, as well as a spirituality that is hinged on prayer, contemplation and action for social justice and transformation.

INTRODUCTION

The complex situation of the poor and the social realities that impinge on them are not new issues. Every encounter with them bothers us and every facet of their suffering moves us into anger and even guilt. Most often, provocative questions arise: What can I do for them? What is the Church doing to respond to their marginalization? Is there anything that the Christian faith and Catholic tradition can do to challenge and guide its faithful to work for social transformation? If they do have the resource, is

it rich and robust enough to put forward a well-defined vision and concrete alternatives to the established systems in society?

This paper points to the Catholic Church's social tradition (henceforth referred to as CST) as a resource to guide involvement toward social transformation. Referred to as the best kept secret of the Church, CST contains profound wisdom based on the Church's reading of the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. In the words of John Paul II, CST "is an accurate formulation of the results of a careful reflection on the complex realities of human existence in society and in international order, in the lights of faith and of the Church's tradition. Its main aim is to interpret realities and to guide Christian behavior" (SRS, 41). We do not refer to CST as a mere codex of papal social doctrines, but as "a complex living tradition of practice and thought, a continuing learning process at the point of intersection of gospel and life."¹

As a living tradition it includes the discernment of Christian communities and individuals who try to make sense of the meaning of their faith within their actual social engagement in the world. Their reflections eventually find articulations in official statements from episcopal conferences and enshrined in papal encyclicals. The Church's documents in due course become the guide for people in their engagement in the world as Christians. New experiences and reflections from the ground can bring the social tradition to new reformulations. This happens through an ongoing process of the pastoral cycle which normally passes through three-stages. John XXIII articulates this in the following terms:

There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what

¹ Johan Verstraeten, "Towards Interpreting Signs of the Times, Conversation with the World and Inclusion of the Poor: Three Challenges for Catholic Social Teaching." *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011): 314-330.

the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: observe, judge act (*Mater et Magistra* 236).

Following this general framework, this paper provides an overview of the tradition in three steps: first, by examining how CST sees/reads/analyzes the realities we encounter each day; second, by understanding how it interprets/judges these realities in the light of the Gospel; and third, by discussing the various types of responses CST has produced over the years.

Considering that CST can be understood as a living tradition of interpretation, communication and praxis that could be viewed from different perspectives and can therefore give way to its ongoing evolution,² we take a hermeneutical lens that privileges the perspectives of those in the margins of society. We adopt an analectical or anadialecical reading (from the perspective of the excluded other), highlighting its transformative potential.

SOCIO-ANALYTIC MEDIATION FROM THE LENS OF THE POOR AND THE OPPRESSED

Catholic social tradition starts by analyzing the situation at hand. In as much as every social condition is complex and multi-faceted, the goal is to achieve a comprehensive and accurate picture of the situation. CST speaks of this task as ‘reading the signs of the times’. We argue that the appreciation of reality is better achieved through an ongoing process of conversation, especially taking the perspective of the excluded, of the local churches, and of the normative sciences to foster critical dialogue with the contemporary world.

Understanding the unfolding of human history comes with a belief that historical events have revelatory value. God’s

² Cartagena expounds on each of these areas of tradition. See Aloysius Lopez Cartagena, *Unlocking the Church’s Best Kept Secret: Principles for the Interpretation, Communication and Praxis of Catholic Social Teaching* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2012).

vision for humanity finds expression in the deepest human longings and struggles for dignity, freedom, and truth. Imbued with a sense of openness toward the modern world, John XXIII speaks of the task of “read[ing] the signs of the times”. In *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII identifies as signs of the times, the movements for workers’ rights (PT 40), women’s rights (PT 41) and the independence of nations from colonial rule (PT 42). Furthermore, he sees hope in the human discovery of the bond that can unite people on the basis of their shared and common human nature to love (PT 129).

Following the vision of John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council made a definitive embrace of the bond between the Church and the world. In the first lines of *Gaudium et spes*, such conviction is expressed in the following terms:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history (GS 1).

In pursuit of this commitment, *Gaudium et spes* clarifies that “the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel” (GS 4). The aim is for the Church to “recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics” (GS 4). This is restated in *Justice in the World*, when it says:

Scrutinizing the ‘signs of the times’ and seeking to detect the meaning of emerging history, while at

the same time sharing the aspirations and questionings of all those who want to build a more human world, we have listened to the Word of God that we might be converted to the fulfilling of the divine plan for the salvation of the world. (JW 2)

The Catholic social tradition bears out the Church's fundamental commitment to understand the situation of the oppressed and marginalized. The development of such tradition is influenced by the changing times, often brought about by challenges from the margins of society. In this regard, the Universal Church recognizes the rights and responsibilities of local churches to do the reading of the signs of the times. Paul VI, who visited India and the Philippines, appreciated the unique conditions of those places, making him assert:

It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church. (OA 4).

Pronouncements from local churches and episcopal conferences take into serious consideration the reflections of Christian communities done in the rough grounds of their experiences and praxis. Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum* was influenced by bishops, priests and laypeople who attempted to understand social issues from the perspective of faith. Cardinal Wilhelm Emmanuel Von Kettler (1811-1877), Bishop of Mainz, Germany; Archbishop James Gibbons (1834-1921), Archbishop of Baltimore, United States; and Cardinal Henry Edward Manning (1808-1892), Archbishop of Westminster, England are few examples of those who critically analyzed social issues in their specific time and context. They became influential to Leo XIII's writing of *Rerum novarum*.

Lay people, like the oppressed workers in Germany, the threatened Knights of Labor in the United States, and protesting Dockworkers in London, raised issues that were heard by their shepherds. University of Sorbonne's young lawyer and professor Antione-Frederic Ozanam (1813-1853), founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP); Dorothy Day (1897-1980) who founded (with Peter Maurin) the Catholic Workers Movement, among others, have done their critical reading of the signs of the times and contributed to the development of the social doctrine of the Church.

Benedict XVI, although conscious of the need for conversation or communication in *Caritas in veritate*, did not apply such openness in his writing of his encyclicals. He never made any reference to local episcopal conferences, and to other stakeholders. Verstraeten explains that Benedict's unilateral view on communication is based on his appreciation that "the Bishops bear 'primary responsibility for the pastoral commitment to evangelize social realities', it also proclaims that they only have the task of 'promoting the teaching and diffusion of the Church's social doctrine.'³ Such direction seems to contradict the consensus reached in various episcopal conferences on economics and development in recent decades.

In the reading and interpretation of reality or of any text, like the social tradition of the Church, perspective matters significantly. The way victors look at history is quite different from the way victims assess it. "Many of the actions that seem necessary and sensible to the people 'at the top' are experienced by those 'at the bottom' as quite outrageously unjust, oppressive and wrong."⁴ Francis Fukuyama argues for the dominant system, claiming that with the collapse of Eastern ideological bloc of the former Soviet Union, liberal democracy may constitute "the endpoint of man's ideological evolution" and therefore be considered as "end of

³ See Johan Verstraeten, "Towards Interpreting Signs of the Times, Conversation with the World and Inclusion of the Poor: Three Challenges for Catholic Social Teaching," *International Journal of Public Theology* 5 (2011): 323.

⁴ Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: Catholic Social Teaching* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2013), 4.

history”.⁵ Liberal democracy has conquered rival ideologies, like hereditary monarchy, fascism, and more recently, communism because it is, in principle, free of internal contradiction, irrationalities, and serious defects.⁶ Such statements seem to be the ultimate expression of the logic of modernization that celebrates metanarratives of reason and freedom underlying the ideology of progress. Conversely, those who suffer exclusion rely on various versions of dependency theory to attack the dominant globalized system as inherently oppressive.

As to the interpretation and use of the CST, Michael Novak is one example of those who align CST with democratic capitalism.⁷ Speaking about John Paul II’s encyclical *Centesimus annus*, he claims that the document approves of ‘reformed capitalism’, which is presented as a model for former communist Eastern Europe and the Third World.⁸ Verstraeten’s interpretation runs contrary to that of Novak:

However important wealth creation and free markets might be, they are, as *Centesimus annus* fully admits, not sufficient. It remains necessary to analyze problems from the perspective of the poor and from the perspective of creating just institutions. Listening to the grassroots experience of the poor, Catholic social teaching cannot avoid a conflict of interpretations.”⁹

The document actually offers a solid critique of capitalism, in view of the evils of consumerism, violations of

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 64.

⁶ Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1995), 159-60.

⁷ See Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1982).

⁸ For an elaborate discussion on this, see Daniel Finn, “Commentary on *Centesimus annus* (On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*)” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, 458.

⁹ Johan Verstraeten, “Justice Subordinated to Love? The Changing Agenda of Catholic Social Teaching Since *Populorum Progressio*,” in *Responsibility, God and Society: Theological Ethics in Dialogue: Festschrift Roggen Burggraeve*, eds. Johan De Tavernier, et al. (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2008), 403.

justice, marginalization of the poor, and maltreatment of workers. The right to private property, the document stresses, is subordinated to the universal destination of the goods, which would require some kind of regulation of the market (CA 30).

Enrique Dussel's liberation ethical perspective, which appropriates Emmanuel Levinas' concept of *alterity*, becomes useful in arguing for an analectical reading of the CST. He claims:

Our discourse starts, at least pedagogically, in an abstract form, from the Levinasian intuition that the 'Other' (*Autruí*) is the original source of all possible discourse, which is essentially an ethical relation and 'appeals' from the 'exteriority'. It means the irruption of the Other, of the poor (of the dominated woman, etc.), which 'appears' in the 'communication community' of current institutionalism of the 'totality', claiming and demanding justice.¹⁰

The totalizing ideological system of liberal capitalism is put into question by the appearance of the 'other' that the same system has excluded. CST has consistently analyzed the world system's capacity to provide genuine development in the lives of people, especially the poor. This perspective is what we highlighted in the reading of the CST's analysis of social reality. Furthermore, if we speak of CST as a tradition of interpretation, communication and praxis, it becomes important that the perspective of excluded sectors be given preference as we recognize their epistemic privilege in their position of exclusion. Doing so may open up greater possibilities for transformation of the system. Paying special attention to asymmetry that often characterizes communication or dialogue, Dussel stresses the need to let the discourse arise from below—from its exclusions. The real

¹⁰ Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity*, 21.

communication community and the agreements it makes should be put into question by the ones it excludes.¹¹

HERMENEUTIC MEDIATION: CHURCH'S SOCIAL TRADITION IN THE MARGINS

The Catholic social tradition has been emphatic that any reading of the signs of the times or analysis of social realities is to be interpreted in the light of the Gospel (GS 4). The task of hermeneutics is quite crucial because the over-all result of social analysis will need to be evaluated in the light of Gospel values. They are also judged as congruent to the ethical principles and criteria that CST has developed through the years from its reading of Scripture.

In the Church's mission as an instrument of integral liberation, CST has relied on Scriptures as a rich resource to inspire the work for justice and social transformation. Considering the distance of time and space between realities as narrated in Scriptures and our own, the greater challenge is in approaching the sacred texts in a manner that its ethical vision still holds sway over social consciences, especially in the pursuit of justice.

There are various ways in reading Scripture. To cite the main ones, we identify biblical-criticism, which has two variants: the first, known as historical-critical method, considers it important to know the author, the audience to whom the writing is addressed, and the specific context of his writing. The goal is to draw out the meaning of the text and understand it with objectivity and clarity, as Friedrich Schleiermacher would claim, more than the author understood himself. The other variant is known as literary and source criticism, which considers biblical writing as pieces of literature. Literary and source criticism traces origins and sources of biblical narratives, and sorts out history from myths, or facts from fiction.

¹¹ See how Dussel demonstrates and reflects upon the concrete types of interpellation from those excluded from their respective hegemonic communities of communication. Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity*, 29ff.

The other way to read Scriptures is to be aware of the distance between the biblical world and our contemporary life. It overcomes the distance by the dynamic process of fusing the horizon of the world of the biblical writer and the world of the reader. We do not read the Bible from a neutral and objective point of view; rather, we bring with us our whole tradition, our concrete experiences and our current exigencies. This is because we cannot escape our historicity nor can we eschew the tradition that nurtures us.¹²

There is, however, a third way, which is called the “normativity of the future”.¹³ It starts with the claim that Scripture is not a static container of the truths of God’s revelation, but a dynamic symbolic medium of God’s ongoing communication to humanity. Divine inspiration is therefore located not just in the past but should be discerned as coming to the present from the future. This future, argues Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd, is the Kingdom of God breaking open our present system of seeing, valuing and living, to invite us to the alternative vision and transformative imagination proclaimed by Jesus the Christ. Central to this in-breaking is the role played by those that the system has marginalized, enslaved, or victimized.¹⁴ Some texts in Scripture do not only portray them as helpless victims, but have even legitimized their marginalization. The “normativity of the future” reading of the Bible, however, values them as channels through which the future of God’s reign breaks away from the past and establish something radically new. This approach requires us to go beyond the Bible’s historical world and, in the light of the experiences of peoples at the margins, discern the future of God’s reign hidden or projected in the biblical texts.

¹² See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, second revised edition (London: Continuum, 2004), 277-284.

¹³ See Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd, eds. *Normativity of the Future: Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective* (Leuven: Peeters Publications, 2010).

¹⁴ Rolando A. Tuazon, “Narrating Ethics from the Margins,” in *Normativity of the Future: Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective*, eds. Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd (Leuven: Peeters Publication, 2010), 297-326.

Both Old and New Testaments, when interpreted from the hermeneutic lens of normativity of the future, bear out a rich foundation of the Catholic social tradition. In the Old Testament, we see a people creating structures of justice and social transformation. In their celebration of the Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee Year, for instance, debts are written off, captives are set free, the land is to rest, and special care is given to widows, orphans and strangers. God's original vision of harmony finds chance for restoration, if not fulfillment, through these mechanisms. Perhaps a more important example is the praxis of the prophets who, while opting to live at the margins of society, indicted those who oppressed the poor of Yahweh and reminded particularly the political and religious leadership to honor their covenantal obligations to God.

Central to the New Testament is the proclamation of Jesus Christ about the in-breaking of God's reign, which brings good news to the poor, grants liberty to captives, gives sight to the blind, set free the oppressed, and announce the coming of liberation (Lk 4:16-21). Equally important is Jesus' own person, as he opted for a simple life with the poor and illiterate of his time. He recognized the possibility of the poor to uplift themselves from their abject condition and refused to conform to established ways of thinking, valuing, and even worshipping. He remained totally free from any compromise with the principalities of his times and died in their hands because of his absolute commitment to God's reign. Expounding on this perspective of the poor as the *Third Look at Jesus*, Carlos Abesamis argues that such perspective is more attuned to the First Look on the Historical Jesus in the Judeo-Christian Tradition, in contrast to the Second Look of Graeco-Roman perspectives.¹⁵

The early followers of Jesus during the first three centuries after his death gradually understood and embraced the prophetic and divine mission of Christ in the world. Evident in the writings of the apostles and, later, the Fathers of the Church, are indictments against greed and power, admonitions about

¹⁵ See Carlos Abesamis, *A Third Look at Jesus: A Guidebook along a Road Least Traveled* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2003).

slavery to wealth and prestige, and exhortations to rely completely on the providence of God. Following Jesus, the early Church practiced the communal sharing of goods and created programs to care for the poor, widows, orphans, newly freed slaves, and strangers.

The foundational inspirations of faith that does justice for the poor and the oppressed gradually faded in the margins when Christianity found its home in the Graeco-Roman culture. This happened especially after the Church became an integral part of the Roman Empire during the Constantinian era. With the transformation of the persecuted Church into a monarchic-aristocratic Christendom Church, power, wealth and influence began to be enjoyed by its leaders who also became functionaries of the state. The prophetic voices of those who took the side of the poor remained alive in the margins. This tradition eventually recaptured bigger space and found greater articulation in modern Catholic social thought.

DEVELOPMENT OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING ON MODERN CAPITALISM

Joe Holland speaks of three stages of modern Catholic social teaching based on the papal strategy vis-à-vis the development of modern industrial capitalism: (1) Pre-Leonine anti-modern papal strategy (1740-1878); (2) Leonine modern papal strategy (1878-1958); and (3) Johannine postmodern papal strategy (1958-present).¹⁶ Using Holland's periodization of history of the CST, we shall situate the poor and their place in the Church's social discourse.

The pre-modern world was governed by State and Church within the framework of medieval syncretism, with the State being in charge of the temporal order, while the Church had jurisdiction over the spiritual realm.¹⁷ Both exercised power in accordance with the understanding of God's design. Society was

¹⁶ Joe Holland, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: The Popes Confront the Industrial Age* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Kenneth Himes, *Christianity and the Political Order: Conflict, Cooptation, and Cooperation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 83.

organized according to the Catholic social order, which was monarchical in structure, and implied acceptance of inequality as part of everyday life. Behind this social arrangement is aristocratic Christianity, which ensured the stability of the *status quo*, understood as the service of the common good.

Such social arrangement was gradually questioned with the emergence of liberalism. Liberal narrative became a significant threat to religion, and its influence in the public sphere became pronounced through secularization. The meta-narrative of reason and freedom found expression in religious (Protestant Reformation), political (revolutions), and economic (liberal capitalism) movements that transformed Western societies. Liberal capitalism, which determines the functioning of the market,¹⁸ has resulted to new social problems. Especially in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, laborers, among them women and children, were exploited as they worked under inhumane conditions. With the intent of defending victims of this oppressive economic system, Marxist socialism's critique of capitalism appealed to the working classes who were struggling for their rights.

The Church's hierarchy was critical of both liberalism and Marxist socialism, especially because they were identified with anticlerical and anti-Catholic tendencies. Pius IX's *Quanta cura* and its appended *Syllabus of Errors* manifested the Church's attempt to hold on to its traditional power and influence. The *Syllabus of Errors* condemned liberalism and its expressions in education (against public schools), and politics (against separation of Church and State), among others.

Leo XIII's response to modernity was initially marked by relative openness. Influenced by liberal and social Catholicism, Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum* (promulgated in 1891) spelled out the Church's moral vision for humanity. Leo XIII emphasized the centrality of human dignity and human rights. Against the socialist project, the rights to private property, participation and

¹⁸ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, vol. 1, eds. R. A. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1981).

subsidiarity were affirmed. Against the claim of unscrupulous capitalists, private property was relativized by the principle of common good and solidarity. Furthermore, the defense of dignity and rights means defense of the poor. “[W]hen there is question of protecting the rights of individuals, the poor and helpless have a claim to special consideration” (RN 29). What was fundamentally argued, in contrast to the Pre-Leonine Church position, is equality of dignity and rights of peoples who share a common humanity.

Leo XIII’s pronouncements in *Rerum novarum* were affirmed forty years later with the publication in 1931 of *Quadragesimo anno*. Pius XI was confronted with a world struggling to have a stable social order after the First World War and the collapse of the Stock Market in 1929. Totalitarian states both in the ideological Left (communism) and in Right (fascism) resorted to iron fists to subject people under full control. Critical of these new developments, *Quadragesimo anno* called for the reconstruction of the social order based on justice and charity to ensure protection of the rights of individuals and groups. In view of this vision, the subsidiary principle was expounded as a way to recognize the rights of individuals and groups against totalitarian states (QA 79).

Referring to postmodernity as “the end of grand narratives”, Jean-François Lyotard observes that there is widespread incredulity to all-encompassing projects and ideological systems.¹⁹ Universal principles are put into question, and unitary and hegemonic discourses are regarded with suspicion. Monolithic centers are deconstructed toward fostering a pluralistic landscape where multiple and even conflicting perspectives are accepted, if not celebrated. Beyond the class discourse that characterized modernity, minority discourses have come also from other marginalized voices. Sensitive to the conditions especially of ethnic minorities, John XXIII’s social encyclical on peace, *Pacem in terris*, asserts:

¹⁹Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 31-41.

It is especially in keeping with the principles of justice that effective measures be taken by the civil authorities to improve a lot of the citizens of an ethnic minority, particularly when that betterment concerns their language, the development of their natural gifts, their ancestral customs, and their accomplishments and endeavors in the economic order. (PT, 96)

The last of the conciliar documents and one of the four major dogmatic constitutions of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes* (promulgated in 1965) is the product of extensive debates regarding the Church's response to the modern world. Regarded as the most authoritative document of the CST in the twentieth century, "it embodied John XXIII's desire that the Council should address the challenges facing the Church in the mid-twentieth century in a way that was above all pastoral."²⁰ The suspicion from previous decades, especially during the time of Pius X, gave way to an optimistic appreciation of humanity, taking the posture of openness to "the profound and rapid change...spreading by degrees around the whole world." (GS 4)

The promise of progress that modern rationality proclaims paradoxically led to the worsening of inequality and resulted to a widening gap between rich and poor. Paul VI wrote *Populorum progressio* (1967) and there questioned dominant models of development focusing on economic growth and "offered a global Christian vision of development in all its 'economic, social, cultural and spiritual aspects.'"²¹ Authentic development could be achieved through solidarity and universal charity, expressed concretely in international aid and loans, through the pursuit of social justice in international trade and other economic

²⁰ David Hollenbach, SJ, "Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)" in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, 266.

²¹ Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 262.

relationships between countries, and the pursuit of the common good.

It was the suffering of peoples under dictatorial regimes, especially in Latin America, that became the focus of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 1971. Kenneth Himes claims: "There was an intentional effort to describe the social question from the vantage point of those who live in nations with widespread and serious poverty. The document takes as its starting point the reality of systemic injustice in the world and the need for Christians to join with one another and all persons of good will to overcome injustice."²² One is not surprised, then, why the Synod of Bishops declared in *Justice in the World* (1971) that:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation (JW 4).

A characteristic feature of the Church's retrieval of the social tradition in the modern era is the dynamism of continuity and change. Significant changes in the reformulations of the living social tradition have been effected through dialogue with new contexts and listening to the experiences of people on the ground. Given the constraints of this paper, it suffices to mention a) the shift from an exclusively European to a more global perspective; b) moving away from institutional concerns of the church to extra-ecclesial agenda of a dialogical engagement in the modern world; c) transitioning from the position of absolute certainty in its teachings to one that is sensitive to the evolving historical consciousness and needs of human persons; d) moving from an overreliance on political and social elites to one that appreciates the participation of grassroots communities in social change; e) moving from an exaggerated focus on the person as

²² Kenneth Himes, OFM, "Commentary on *Justitia in Mundo*," in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, 333.

source of sin toward one that highlights the rootedness of personal sin in structures; and f) shifting from a tradition that originates from the center to one that is articulated from the margins of church and society.

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES OF THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL TRADITION

The overarching principle of CST, in the context of marginalization, is the dignity of every human person. It is a fundamental call to recognize the rights especially those in who are excluded and oppressed. We shall elaborate on this and then discuss other principles that support, protect, and promote human dignity. Then we shall focus on the core values behind the supporting principles.

Highlighting the insights from the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II speaks of ‘man as the way of the Church’. “The church’s social doctrine focuses on man as he is involved in a complex network of relationships within modern societies” (CA 53). It is the dignity of each person and his/her human rights that the Church upholds in all the social documents. That dignity is most fundamental for every person regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, economic status, age, religion, class and educational attainment. “For sacred scripture teaches that man was created ‘to the image of God,’ is capable of knowing and loving his Creator, and was appointed by him as master of all earthly creatures, that he might subdue them and use them to God’s glory” (GS 12). Furthermore, human dignity is esteemed “far more highly, for men are redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, they are by grace the children and friends of God and heirs of eternal glory” (PT 10).

The basic recognition of human dignity comes with the fundamental respect and defense of human rights. “Indeed, precisely because he is a person, he has rights and obligations flowing directly and simultaneously from his very nature. As these rights are universal and inviolable, so they cannot in any way be surrendered” (PT 9). The pastoral letter of the US Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, reiterates, “Society as a whole,

acting through public and private institutions, has the moral responsibility to enhance human dignity and protect human rights.”²³ It is further stated as a basic moral principle that “Every economic decision and institution must be judged in the light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person” (EJA, 13).

John XXIII enumerates human rights that should be promoted and defended: right to life and a worthy standard of living”; rights pertaining to moral and cultural values; right to worship God according to one’s conscience; right to choose freely one’s state of life; economic rights”; right of meeting and association; “right to emigrate and immigrate and political Rights (PT 11-27). These rights are oriented to the pursuit of a truly human life and development. It is affirmed by the Second Vatican Council when it states:

Therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family; the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accordance with the upright norm of one’s own conscience, to protection of privacy and to rightful freedom in matters religious too (GS 26).

It is interesting to note that when CST speaks of human rights, it does so in a manner that is situated within the network of interpersonal relationships and in the context of the ‘community of mankind’. It takes the challenge to promote ‘communion and interdependence between persons’ seriously, based on the communitarian nature of man’s vocation. Beyond individualistic ethic, it emphasizes responsibility and duty to ‘promote the common good,’ ‘reverence and love of enemy,’ ‘essential equality among men and social justice,’ ‘participation,’

²³ U.S. Catholic Bishops, “Economic Justice for All” (1986), in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, eds. David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 575.

and ‘human solidarity’ (GS 23-32). It is in this sense that the human rights discourse of CST makes an important consideration of the community as well as of the duties of the individual to his community. There is the need to keep a healthy balance between the individual and the community, as well as between rights and duties.²⁴

Flowing from the principal concern to uphold human dignity, some other principles serve as criteria for judging social realities to guide the Christian response to the social ills of our times. The first pair of principles is that of private property and universal destination of goods. According to the CST, “private property and other forms of private ownership of goods ‘assure a person a highly necessary sphere for the exercise of his personal and family autonomy and ought to be considered as an extension of human freedom.’” It “is an essential element of an authentically social and democratic economic policy, and it is the guarantee of a correct social order” (CSDC, 176). Yet, one cannot speak of the right to private property in absolute terms. This right is limited by the biblical vision that all of the earth’s goods created by God are for the integral human development of everyone. As John Paul II argues, “the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone” (LE, 14). John Paul II further speaks of the ‘universal destination of the earth’s goods’ as a balancing principle to private property (CA 30-31).

The second pair is the principle of participation and the principle of subsidiarity. The principle of subsidiarity calls for the respect of persons and groups to decide and exercise full responsibility within their level of the social organization. Quoting in full *Quadragesimo anno* 79, John XXIII states:

It is a fundamental principle of social philosophy, fixed and unchangeable, that one should not withdraw from individuals and commit to the

²⁴ Rolando A. Tuazon, Human Rights and/or Religious Ethical Values: Examining an Ambivalent Relationship,” *Hapag: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Theological Research* 2, no. 1 (2005): 43-76.

community what they can accomplish by their own enterprise and industry. So, too, it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and a disturbance of right order, to transfer to the larger and higher collectivity functions which can be performed and provided for by lesser and subordinate bodies. Inasmuch as every social activity should, by its very nature, prove a help to members of the body social, it should never destroy or absorb them (*Mater et magistra* 53).

It would be disastrous to society if social groups at the lower level are denied of their capacity to contribute to the larger social body. Speaking of subsidiarity as deeply bound to the principle of participation, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace states:

The characteristic implication of subsidiarity is participation which is expressed essentially in a series of activities by means of which the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which he belongs. Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good.²⁵

It has also been affirmed that democracies rely on participation as one of its pillars. “It is in keeping with their dignity as persons that human beings should take active part in government, although the manner in which they share in it will depend on the level of development of the country to which they belong” (PT 73). This is especially true if the decisions that will be made will have implications to their own development. All persons have the right and duty to become “principal architects of their own economic and social development” (JW 71). To deprive

²⁵ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 132-133.

them of that is tantamount to committing injustice.²⁶ The same is argued by the US Bishops when they said that “Social justice implies that persons have an obligation to be active and productive participants in the life of society and that society has a duty to enable them to participate in this way” (EJA, 71).

The third pair consists of the principle of solidarity and of preferential option for the poor. “Solidarity highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an even more committed unity” (CSDC 192). *Gaudium et spes* makes a clear affirmation that God did not make humans in isolation, but rather “it has pleased God to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals, without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people who acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness” (GS 32). Such sense of unity is based on the fundamental identity and dignity we all share as human beings. As Gerald Beyer states, “The recognition of the *imago Dei* in all persons (Gen. 1:27), which connotes equal dignity, enables the apprehension of human interdependence, or ‘de facto solidarity.’”²⁷ He further claims that the model of solidarity is the Trinitarian God, Whose three Persons live in mutuality and loving relationship.

Thinking along this line, Verstraeten speaks of the need to move away from a deistic image God and adopt an “image of God who is a community and creates a community.” Using the root metaphor of the “invisible handshake versus the invisible hand of self-interest that is operative in liberal capitalism, he claims that such interpretation of society “breaks through collective individualism and points to covenant and solidarity as primordial features of society.”²⁸ With such insight, it follows that

²⁶ See discussion of the different meanings or frameworks of understanding Justice in Raymund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd, *When Love is not Enough* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005).

²⁷ Gerald J. Beyer, “The Meaning of Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching,” *Political Theology* 15, no. 1, (2014): 9.

²⁸ Johan Verstraeten, “Catholic Social Thinking as Living Tradition that Gives Meaning to Globalization as a Process of Humanization,” in *Globalization*

solidarity could be understood as a ‘virtue’ which does not refer merely to “a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good” (SRS 38).

The fact that humanity is confronted with common problems, the call for solidarity becomes far more urgent especially in reaching out to the poor who may find themselves in difficult situations. “The principle of the universal destination of goods requires that the poor, the marginalized and in all cases those whose living conditions interfere with their proper growth should be the focus of particular concern. To this end, the preferential option for the poor should be reaffirmed in all its force” (CSDC 182). A definitive stance taken by bishops from Latin America during the Medellin Conference in Colombia in 1968, preferential option for the poor is a commitment to be in solidarity with the poor, making their problems and struggles as their own. Such commitment is appreciated against the background of the structural injustice unfolding in Latin America that challenged the Church to be poor, assuming her ‘conscientizing’ role as she participates in people’s struggle for liberation.²⁹

Life unto its fullness (Jn 10:10) is the ultimate value that underpins CST’s social-ethical principles, to be at the service of human life. “It is lawful,” says Thomas Aquinas, “for a man to hold private property; and it is also necessary for the carrying on of human life” (RN 19). Right to life and a worthy standard of living are also affirmed. “We see that every man has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means, which are suitable for the proper development of life” (PT 11). Yet, as far as the Church is concerned, quality of life is not defined by materialist ideologies but by faith that opens humanity up to transcendence. Paul VI clarifies that “the Church is certainly not willing to restrict her mission only to the religious field and dissociate herself from

and *Catholic Social Thought: Present Crisis, Future Hope*, eds. John A. Coleman and William F. Ryan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 31.

²⁹ Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: Catholic Social Teaching* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2013), 180-181.

man's temporal problems. Nevertheless, she reaffirms the primacy of her spiritual vocation and refuses to replace the proclamation of the Kingdom by the proclamation of forms of human liberation" (EN 34). Faith, consequently, does not alienate people and offer them an escape from the world. "Christians, on pilgrimage toward the heavenly city, should seek and savor the things which are above. This duty in no way decreases, but rather increases, the weight of their obligation to work with all men in constructing a more human world" (GS 57). The faith that the CST speaks of liberates peoples and frees them to "act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8).

Justice is one value that could mean many things to many people. It has been interpreted as fairness, righteousness, participation, etc.³⁰ In CST, justice means a great regard to, respect for, and promotion of the dignity and rights of each human person. This recognizes the fundamental equality that every human being shares with everyone else, not simply because of his or her humanity, but because each person is fashioned to the image and likeness of God. "Human society will be such as we have just described it, if the citizens, guided by justice, apply themselves seriously to respecting the rights of others and discharging their own duties" (PT 35). But while justice is the foundation of all human relationships in society, love is its crown. Love is the life-giving spirit that binds people in meaningful sense of mutual responsibility and commitment. "A sign of love will be the concern to give the truth and to bring people into unity" (EN 79). Paul VI speaks of this in the following statement, "The work of development will draw nations together in the attainment of goals pursued with a common effort if all, from governments and their representatives to the last expert, are inspired by brotherly love and moved by a sincere desire to build a civilization founded on world solidarity" (PP 73). Without justice, love is simply romantic if not deceptive; and without love, justice can become legalistic if not tyrannical. Love is what gives human beings genuine freedom.

³⁰ See Mary Elsbernd and Reimund Bieringer, *When Love is not Enough: A Theo-Ethic of Justice* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002).

Freedom is another value that has layers of meaning. But, for CST, it is our core capacity to fully realize our humanity, developing our potentials and capabilities, leading meaningful lives based on our fundamental convictions and commitments. In view of the ultimate sense of meaning and purpose, religious freedom is fundamental. John XXIII, claims “This genuine, this honorable freedom of the sons of God, which most nobly protects the dignity of the human person, is greater than any violence or injustice; it has always been sought by the Church and always most dear to her” (PT 14). Domination, oppression and marginalization obstruct our human possibilities and hinder the pursuit of our dreams and purpose. Liberation from such sinful structures in society is at the core of the CST’s moral vision. Authentic freedom can be had only when the pursuit of our purpose in life is based on the truth of our humanity and an authentic vision of the world and society. “A civic society is to be considered well-ordered, beneficial and in keeping with human dignity if it is grounded on truth” (PT 35). In that way, truth can set us free. “The Gospel entrusted to us is also the word of truth. A truth which liberates and which alone gives peace of heart is what people are looking for when we proclaim the Good News to them. The truth about God, about man and his mysterious destiny, about the world; the difficult truth that we seek in the Word of God and of which, we repeat, we are neither the masters nor the owners, but the depositories, the heralds and the servants” (EN 78).

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL RESPONSE FROM AND TO THE MARGINS

If we are to use the see-judge-act methodology of the CST, we have thus far discussed the “seeing” and “judging” parts of the dynamic process. It is time to turn now to the stage of “acting”, which basically tries to answer the question: how shall we as Church respond to the social conditions that confront us? What means and ways are available for the Church to use? Who are the agents of action, and what attitudes should be adopted in acting?

To arrive at a thorough appreciation of how crucial the “acting” stage is, it behooves us to make a historical sketch of the spectrum of perspectives how and from where the Church understood the meaning and demands of the faith vis-à-vis the social conditions of the time. At the risk of oversimplification, we shall use models of church engagement with the secular world and draw lessons therefrom.

In the first of these models, the Church understands itself as an institution that belongs to the realm of the divine. The betterment of the secular and temporal world is not its immediate concern, and the Church tended to be “against” what the world stands for, considering it as corrupt and sinful, full of evil and deceit. The main task of Christians is not to repair and save the earthly city but to flee from it and save one’s soul. In the “*fuga mundi*” model, faith is disengaged from the demands for social change as the pursuit of individual spiritual perfection is the ideal. This model speaks of the separation between religion and politics, which can be traced in Augustine’s *Civitas Dei and Civitas Terrena*, and which finds “not only in the Protestant traditions (and not least in Milbank’s radical orthodoxy), but also in the official social teaching of the Catholic Church as it is for example articulated in the encyclical *Deus caritas est* of Benedict XVI.”³¹

The second model is called the “Church of the World” or the Christendom model. This was the stance that legitimizes the temporal power and dominion of the institutional Church. From the time the Christian religion became the religion of the Roman Empire, clerics acquired temporal power, exercised political authority, and became part of the ruling class. Within this scheme of things, the Church found herself located at the center of power and influence, enjoying positions of privilege in the higher levels of the social ladder. Ecclesiastical hierarchy taught obedience and submission to its flock while to the poor and marginalized it could only exercise paternalistic charity. If the previous model is an escape from the world, this one called for a complete embrace. This model is identified with the fusion of religion and politics

³¹ Johan Verstraeten, “Religion and Politics: Revisiting an Old Problem in Light of Different Models of Thought,” *Hapag* 7, no. 1 (2010): 16.

that Verstraeten speaks about either in unmediated approaches (from theocratic systems to variants of Caesaro-papist options) or in moderate forms (Catholic political parties, Christian democrats, civil religion).³²

The third model, known as the “Church in the world” is a radical shift of location and stance. Retrieving the prophetic tradition in the Bible, it called for the Church’s persevering and committed engagement in the world, affirming its goodness, denouncing its evils, and transforming it in conformity with the spirit of the Gospel. At the heart of this model is the method of discernment, which is reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. As for the Church’s mission, the call is for integral evangelization, one that refuses to bless the *status quo* but rather insists on radical change. The Church, both leaders and members, locates itself at the margins of society by choice, recognizing the potential of the poor and marginalized as principal agents of social transformation toward a fuller life in freedom, truth, justice, and love.

In this model, the Church is in solidarity with the poor, courageously vindicating and defending them. As affirmed during the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II), “Pastors and members of the Church will courageously defend and vindicate the rights of the poor and the oppressed, *even when doing so will mean alienation or persecution from the rich and powerful*” (PCP-II, no. 131).³³ The vision is for the local church to be the “Church of the Poor”. This is the working model that the present institutional Church uses and tries to practice. One can identify this model with theological projects associated with non-conservative Public Theology which “critically engages Christian belief and practice in relation to public affairs” and is against the conservative version which makes “use of theology as a provider of meaning or as a legitimization for the political order.”³⁴ We see this model operative in political theology and liberation theology, both of which bring the resources of the Judeo-Christian tradition

³² Ibid., 20-21.

³³ *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, 1992), 50.

³⁴ Johan Verstraeten, *Religion and Politics*, 28-29.

to affirm a critical stance vis-à-vis the established social order that marginalizes the poor and the oppressed.

Christians through the centuries have given different types of responses to the social problems that confront them. It is important to know which of them is more congruent with the methodology, principles, and values of CST. The first is recourse to prayer. When people are faced with problems too difficult to bear and endure, people call on God. They usually do it through the intercession of Mary and/or the saints, to intervene in their lives. In *Spe salvi*, Benedict XVI asserts: “Prayer is a school of hope... To pray is not to step outside history and withdraw to our own private corner of happiness. When we pray properly, we undergo a process of inner purification which opens us up to God and thus to our fellow human beings as well. In prayer we must learn what we can truly ask of God—what is worthy of God” (SS 33). Just as we recognize the power of prayer in our lives, it is important to caution us, especially those, in the margins of society, that such recourse does not involve a fatalistic posture to the given reality. It gives us greater courage and generosity to participate in God’s working in our world.

Another common response takes the form of charity that is rooted in love. Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in veritate* speaks of charity in the following way: “Love —*caritas*— is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace...All people feel the interior impulse to love authentically: love and truth never abandon them completely, because these are the vocation planted by God in the heart and mind of every human person.” (CV 1) This internal disposition finds concrete expressions in programs or works of charity. Feeding programs, relief operations, giving bundles of joy, dole-out funds, among others, are now familiar fixtures in our efforts to uplift the poor and marginalized. While the intention is magnanimous and sincere, the effects of charitable projects are immediate and temporary rather than deep and enduring. In some instances, charity is exercised from a paternalistic posture, where the pastoral agent considers himself as the source of ‘grace’ and power to change lives. At its worst, this

type of response can create undue dependence of the poor on those who have and reinforce patronage.

The third type pertains to the use of violence to correct long-standing and deeply rooted social problems. Poverty in the Philippines, for instance, is being addressed by some social movements that foment revolutionary fervor and violence to destroy machineries of the state and institute its own power and governance. Especially during the Marcos dictatorship, some local theologians saw that the time was ripe for people to undertake revolutionary activities against the tyrant.³⁵ In CST, violence is not the option for Christians because violence breeds violence, and conflicting parties get entrenched in the cycle of hate and killing. Paul VI in *Populorum progressio* states: “We know, however, that a revolutionary uprising—save where there is manifest, long-standing tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country—produces new injustices, throws more elements out of balance and brings on new disasters. A real evil should not be fought against at the cost of greater misery” (PP 31). Paul VI’s appeal for non-violence was eventually watered down by some currents of liberation movements, explaining that the situations merit exceptions as spelled out above. Yet the prescribed ideal to bring about the greater good is ‘active non-violence’ which has been proven to be successful and transformative, for instance, in India by Mahatma Gandhi or in the Philippines’ bloodless People Power revolution in 1986.

The task of community development and organization has been a tested form of pastoral response that can bring about and sustain the process of social change and transformation. It rests on the assumption that people are the principal agents of their own history; that ordinary people have the resources that could be harnessed for their own betterment; that we can learn from the wisdom and commitment of ordinary people; and lastly,

³⁵ See Louie G. Hechanova, C.Ss.R., “Towards a Moral Theology of Violence”, 15-23, and Pedro Salgado, “Revolution and the Church”, 24-60, both found in *Raging Hope: a Compilation of Talks on the Church Involved in Social Transformation and its Emerging Theology, SPI Series 1* (Quezon City: SPI and Claretian Publications, 1983).

that they move in view of their needs. This happens most dynamically through the organization of basic ecclesial communities. It is like a movement “[F]rom option for the poor to Church of the poor in Catholic social teaching.”³⁶ Having flourished in Latin America among the poor, the Christian faith became responsive to dehumanizing conditions and was brought at the service of liberation. Leonardo Boff believes that it is in the Basic Christian Communities where we see the rebirth of the Church through the movement of the Holy Spirit.³⁷

Such process of organizing includes the dialogue of life and immersion in the conditions of those in the margins of society. Immersion enables the pastoral agent or organizer to understand the situation better from the perspective of those who are deeply affected. There should be a way to recognize not only the “shadows” in the social condition but also the “lights,” i.e., the potentials, strengths and giftedness among the people. The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) articulated this in terms of the three-fold dialogue: “dialogue with the living traditions, dialogue with the cultures and dialogue with the religions. All of these converge to the dialogue of life.” Such formulation is in view of the fact that Asia is home to many peoples in situations of poverty, of varied and rich cultures and the birth of many world religions. The bishops stated “Dialogue is therefore seen as the basic mode and attitude of the Church in Asia.”³⁸

Considering that the people may have accepted their lot with sense of fatalistic surrender to the reality in question, conscientization is also an important dimension of the process. Developed as a methodology for liberation by Paulo Freire in 1970, its central goal is “to awaken in the oppressed the knowledge, creativity, and constant critical reflective capacities

³⁶ Arnel F. Lagarejos, *The Church of the Poor: A New Perspective on the Church, the State and the Poor* (Pasig: Educational Resources Development Center, 1999), 105.

³⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997).

³⁸ Statement of the Federation of the Asian Bishops’ Conferences, FABC 1, no. 12. See in FAPA 14.

necessary to unveil, demystify, and understand the power relations responsible for their oppressed marginalization and, through this recognition, begin a project of liberation through praxis which invariable, requires consistent, never-ending critical reflection and action.”³⁹ With the current development in the pursuit of integral human development of those in situation of poverty and marginalization, one could also be more positive in allowing them to discover the richness of their gifts and potentials as human persons, capable of transforming their reality into something more positive through their own dream for the fullness of life.

The formation of leaders as change agents is one crucial but difficult task in community development and organization. Through initial and ongoing formation, participants are drawn from marginalized communities, encouraged to have a better understanding of the situation through analysis and reflection, and learn new skills that would make them servant leaders eager to work for justice and social transformation. Formation should be integral and holistic, touching on the core values and spirituality of the leaders.⁴⁰ Change of systems in society should come along with the change and purification of hearts.

Mobilization brings the whole process to its peak where actual actions on behalf of justice are done. As cited above, “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of the proclamation of the Gospel” (JW 1). This action may take different forms of engagement: it could be legal, like involvement in electoral processes, policy change interventions, and street parliamentary activities; it may be extra-legal, like civil disobedience, pressure politics; and even illegal, like armed struggle with those in the underground movement. But, as noted earlier, CST resists violence and opts for a more humane and

³⁹ Donaldo Macedo, “Introduction to the 50th Anniversary Edition,” in Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc, 1970, 1993, 2008), 2.

⁴⁰ Larry C. Spears, “Introduction: Tracing the Past, Present and Future of Servant Leadership,” in *Focus on Leadership: Servant-Leadership for the 21st Century*, eds. Larry C. Spears and Michelle Lawrence (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 1-16.

authentically Christian approach to social change, recognizing the fundamental dignity and rights of every person, even of those who perpetuate injustice. The way to bring them to change is to allow them to recognize their fundamental goodness, which Christians should be able to see in them.

Networking and partnership are indispensable elements in mobilization. The issues that confront Christians in the world are related to broader systemic relations. Any meaningful response to social issues ought to be accomplished in a more systemic way. As Christians, the exhortation of John Paul II, which calls for globalized solidarity in Christian charity, is a source of inspiration. But a similar pursuit in the global level to ensure global justice and systemic change should equally be given attention, something that could be done through global networking and collaboration, for instance the presence of the Catholic Church in framing global issues, Catholic schools and hospitals, charitable institutions, and church-based community-organizing groups. To this should be added international Catholic organizations like *Caritas Internationalis*, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), and international religious congregations engaging in the work for social justice.

Celebration is another important component in the process of organizing communities. Liturgical celebrations give the community a chance to celebrate small victories in the struggle for life, justice and peace. “No person has really entered into the heart of the liturgical spirit if he has not been seized also with the veritable passion for the reestablishment of justice.”⁴¹ The symbolic nature of the liturgy also offers a rich resource for people to undertake a more thorough-going experience of soul-searching.

SPIRITUALITY OF THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL TRADITION

The type of response required by the CST ought to be persevering and hopeful, which is possible only through profound

⁴¹ Virgil George Michel, “Timely Tracts: Social Justice,” *Orate Fratres* 12, no. 3 (January 1938), 132, cited by Daniel G. Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 213.

spirituality. Without this grounding, one can be taken over by activism, which may lead to burnout, misguided decisions, loss of Christian identity, and the regime of ideologies. What propels us to act ought not be the ideologies of the times but our discernment of God's own design and purpose that we discover through the reading of the signs of the times. One may therefore speak of important elements in the CST spirituality: grounding in the situation, in the community, especially of the marginalized, in the self and in God.

Spirituality of liberation is grounded in reality. "The approach is always one of respect for and honesty with the situation: respecting the truth of reality, being faithful to it, letting oneself be guided by the real aspects, never ignoring, distorting, let alone falsifying reality."⁴² God makes Himself visible in the events of human life and history. As far as the past is concerned, we appreciate the heart of our faith, which is centered on the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, i.e., God becoming part of our condition, sharing with our humanity in order to divinize us. Pastoral agents and community organizers are called to be modern day prophets announcing the presence of God's graciousness amidst evil in the world, denouncing these evils, and rectifying systems that reproduce them. As expressed by Casaldáliga and Vigil, "It is a holiness that confronts the sin of the world, looks it in the face, condemns it prophetically and commits itself to correcting it."⁴³

As Christians, the work for justice and social transformation necessitates being part of a community imbued with the vision that moves one to pursue life, truth, freedom and justice. Rooting our identity with God who is a Trinity, a community, Krier Mich claims, "That the community-focused message and community-related principles are at the heart of the Catholic social tradition as they were at the time of Jesus."⁴⁴

⁴² Pedro Casaldaliga and Jose-Maria Vigil, *Political Holiness: A Spirituality of Liberation*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 17.

⁴³ Ibid, 177.

⁴⁴ Marvin L. Krier Mich, *The Challenge and Spirituality of Catholic Social Teaching*, revised edition (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2012), 99.

Dialogue in such a community is crucial in discerning together God's will and design for humanity. Considering that the marginalized are sources of transformative vision, starting with their experience of exclusion, they are accorded preferential option and greater spaces for empowerment. "What is even more important from a Christian point of view is our belief that God 'chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world' (1 Cor. 1:27-28)."⁴⁵ Therefore, the marginalized should be allowed to speak and determine the agenda of conversation from their own situation of exclusion so that their contestation and indictment of the dominant system may give way to its transformation and change.

One can go through life staying in the surface where desires and needs determine the course of existence. "Our lack of self-knowledge can contribute to many other kinds of disastrous consequences when we are engaged in what we falsely judge to be improving the lot of other people."⁴⁶ The journey to interiority, '*pagbabalik-loob*' (literally "journey to the innermost self", but in this context means "conversion") starts with a change of heart and mind. The moment of grace happens when one decides to move further to the core of one's being and discover therein the "image of God", which is the authentic basis of the dignity of the human person. Having experienced such would make the person move through life with a greater sense of dignity, purpose and mission. Such mission, which is meant to pursue fullness of life for all of humanity, would be the source of hope, especially for those who suffer in the margins of society.

At the core of Catholic tradition is a fundamental call to be constantly open to God. Christians are invited to have a pronounced rootedness in the Spirit of God through discernment, prayer and contemplation. "Contemplation is not the discovery of God through retreat from the world...It is opening our eyes to discover God waiting for us in the most

⁴⁵ Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: Catholic Social Teaching*, 4.

⁴⁶ Bernard Hoose, "Spirituality and Morality in a Social Context," in *Catholic Social Justice: Theological and Practical Explorations*, eds. Philomena Cullen, Bernard Hoose and Gerard Mannion (New York: Continuum, 2007).

unpromising situations...We learn to see properly, to see in the dark, and above all to see compassionately, as God sees us.”⁴⁷ As prophets, they are called to proclaim the Reign of God, experienced as an abounding graciousness in our life in the here and now, but finding fullest realization in the end times. Such prophetic proclamation includes denunciation of evil and annunciation of the good in society based on one’s appreciation of the will of God discerned in the Sacred Scriptures and in Tradition, like the social teachings of the Church. As kings in the way of Jesus, they are called to humble service in love and justice.

CONCLUSION

This paper has given an overview on the social tradition of the Catholic Church. We explained the method of social analysis used by the CST in reading the signs of the times with the help of examples. We then discussed the method of interpreting these signs in the light of the Gospel and consider the “normativity of the future” as the most appropriate tool in using the Scriptures to fully appreciate the meaning of the CST’s ethical principles and core values. Lastly, we examined the various types of church response to the social conditions of its time and argued for the organization and development of marginalized communities as the most congruent way to concretize, at least in the current Philippine context, the Catholic social tradition.

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⁴⁷ Timothy Radcliffe, OP, Foreword, in Eric Borgman, *Dominican Spirituality: An Exploration* (London: Continuum: 2001), vii. Cited in Duncan MacLaren, Preface in *Catholic Social Justice: Theological and Practical Explorations*, ix.