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Christianity and International Development: An Overview

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Abstract

Religion has made a forceful entry in development studies in recent years. Largely neglected and assumed to disappear as societies modernized, its presence in the lives of the majority of people in the non-Western world and its social and political influence is abiding. Greater literacy about religion is therefore needed in the social sciences, and in development studies more specifically. The paper provides a brief overview of Christianity for an audience of social scientists who work in the areas of poverty, wellbeing, inequality and justice. Part I introduces the fundamentals of Christianity and their implications for social and political engagement. Part II outlines a Christian perspective international development.

Introduction

'Before the white man came**,** we had the land and they had the Bible; now we have the Bible and they have the land.' So goes an African saying. Development studies has long been suspicious of religion, and rightly so. The evangelization of the Americas was mixed with the greedy motives of the Kingdoms of Spain and Portugal to plunder the continent of its resources. Bringing Christianity to Africa and the colonization of the continent were not very distinguishable enterprises. The evangelization of Africans and the expansion of the Empire went hand in hand. The technology and skills of the colonial powers made Christianity appealing and served to justify its superiority (Hastings, 1994).

On the other hand, the Christian religion has paradoxically been a powerful force for defending human dignity. When the exploitation of indigenous people was widespread in Latin America during colonisation, Bartolomé de las Casas, a Dominican friar, became the pioneer of human rights and defended freedom of conscience and of religion. In Africa, at the time of independence, a large proportion of educational and health services were provided by Christian missionaries. Today, so-called 'faith-based organizations' provide more than half of all health care services in Sub-Saharan Africa (see Clarke et al., 2008).

It is difficult for anyone working or researching in the field of international development not to avoid confronting Christian beliefs and practices, not only given the

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numbers– an estimated 2.1 billion Christians worldwide[2] – but also given their influence in social, economic and political life. This invites a re-assessment of the way religion has been researched and taken into account in development studies so far (Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011). A major step in that direction is to understand religion from within and grasp the language through which it apprehends international development.[3] The object of this paper is to enable this with regard to Christianity.

The paper is divided into two parts. Part I discusses the fundamentals of Christianity and its social, economic and political implications. It emphasises that Christian beliefs are inseparable from a community of people who follow Jesus Christ and aim at continuing his mission of revealing God in the world. The paper then describes the defining beliefs of this community, their principal Creed, and what this affirmation of faith implies for social and political engagement. Christianity is what those who belong to the global Christian community believe and do in light of these beliefs. The Christian religion is therefore characterized by heterogeneity, for different members have diverse interpretations of these core beliefs. There is no unified interpretation of Christian doctrine. Given that the Catholic Church has the largest number of adherents among the Christian community and the most unified interpretation of doctrine, the paper will present a Christian perspective from within the Catholic tradition. Part II outlines three major features of this perspective on international development: 1) human dignity and the inseparability of the material and spiritual dimensions of human life; 2) humans are called to live in communion with each other and with God, therefore human dignity is inseparable from solidarity and concern for the good of all; 3) human actions are marked by sin, therefore the struggles for justice and human dignity are inseparable from conversion to God.

Part I: The Christian faith: The Creed

Discipleship and community

The word 'Christian' was first used at Antioch to refer to the followers of Jesus, a Jewish man born in Palestine circa 6 BC and who claimed to be Messiah of the people of Israel, the Christ.[4] His mission was to reveal the face of God. His birth already challenged the political and religious establishment of the time. The Gospel of Luke relates that some shepherds, one

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[2] See the World Christian Database at http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org.

[3] See especially chapter 6 'Dialoguing Traditions' of *Religion in Development* (Deneulin, 2009).

[4] *Kristos* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word 'Messiah', the anointed one. In the Hebrew Scriptures, prophets and kings were anointed to symbolize that they had a mission from God (Johnson, 2003: 115).

of the most marginalized professions at the time, were the first to recognize him as the Messiah, God's messenger to the world, and that in his childhood. The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) report that it is at his baptism in adulthood that Jesus began to reveal God publicly. The prologue of St John's gospel writes that Jesus is the Word of God who came into the world.

According to the gospel accounts, Jesus chose disciples to accompany him and witness to his life. They were chosen so that, by living closely to his ministry, they would reveal in turn God in the world by acting like Jesus. This dynamic reaches its climax at the Last Supper when Jesus washes his disciples' feet (John 13) – a gesture which prefigures his imminent self-giving and death – and summons them to do the same: to serve one another and reveal the face of a servant God. This may risk death, for revealing the face of God is often at odds with religious and political authorities (cf. infra).

The early disciples whom Jesus chose to witness his ministry went on to continue his works of revelation after his death, and made other disciples. As the number of disciples grew, they met in small assemblies at the end of the Sabbath day in a disciple's house to re-enact the Last Supper and remember Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and so instituting the church (*ekklesia* or 'assembly' in Greek). Divisions and disagreements about how to live the Jesus way were however not uncommon. As time went by and direct witnesses of Jesus' life died, these assemblies put in writing the story of Jesus. These became the Gospels, named after the disciple around whom the assembly was gathered.

As the number of Jesus' followers grew in the first centuries after Jesus' death, disagreements among the Christian community widened further. Some denied the human nature of Jesus; others denied the resurrection of the body of Christ. In the face of mounting disagreements and fragmentation, which threatened the unity of the empire newly officially Christian, the emperor Constantine called a meeting of church leaders in Nicea in 325, the first Council of the Church (Johnson, 2003: 32-36), to set some fundamentals from which departing was at the risk of being excluded from the Christian community.[5] The Council of Nicea declared that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. The leaders of the Church met again in 381 in Constantinople, declared the doctrine of the Trinity (that God was a

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[5] Symbolizing membership to the Christian community through profession of faith derives from the Jewish tradition of the 'Shema Israel' (Deuteronomy 6: 4), where affirmation of belief in the one God defined the Jewish community against polytheism (Johnson, 2003:11-13).

communion of three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit), and agreed on a profession of faith, the Creed, which would define belonging to the Christian community.

From this account of origins of Christianity, one can observe that beliefs and community are closely intertwined. It is the profession of faith of the first disciples who recognized Jesus as the Messiah, which established the Christian community. But it is through that community that people come to believe and profess the Christian faith. Because there is a community of disciples who continue Jesus' work of revealing God in the world, people can profess a Christian faith and believe in God. The Christian faith and Christian community are inseparable. Christianity started with a few people who recognized Jesus as Messiah, and who responded to his invitation to follow him and live like he did. Faith and discipleship, that is, following Jesus through words and actions, go hand in hand. This has considerable implications for understanding the role of Christianity in international development: Christianity is not only a set of beliefs one adheres to, but also a way of life. Proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God through prayer and worship is inseparable from actions which aim at revealing the face of God in economic, social and political structures. The next sections discuss the Creed in its version known as the 'Symbol of the Apostles'.

God the Creator

'We believe in God, creator of heaven and earth'. The starting point of the affirmation of Christian faith is the belief that all creation and creatures do not exist at random, but have been created by God's gratuitous love. The gospels narrate some of Jesus' miracles to manifest that God has power over creation, and that creation belongs to God.

For those who profess that God is the creator of all that exists, not respecting creation implies not respecting God. Humans have been given the natural environment as God's gift to provide for their needs, but it is a gift they have to cherish and protect. They are stewards, not owners, of creation. Therefore, material goods are not the property of humans, but ultimately belong to God and serve God's glory.[6] This may imply limits on private property to serve the good of all (cf. part II).

If one believes that God created the world out of love to manifest his glory, all created life is called to share in God's glory, for this is why creation exists. Human beings are called

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[6] I avoid referring to God with gendered categories. No name can capture the reality of God. Jews write YHWH, the first letters of the Hebrew words of God's name revealed to Moses 'I am who I am' (Exodus, 3:5). Saying 'Yah' involves inspiring and 'weh' expiring, which connects God to the breath of life.

to reflect the glory of God in their body, in their relations with each other, and their relation with the natural environment. Christians believe that all human beings have been created in the image of God and are called to manifest God's love in the world. When social, political and economic processes distort the capacity of humans to live in the image of God, Christians believe that restoring right relationships between people and the environment is part of affirming their belief in God the creator.

When economic, social and political structures deny a 12-year girl education because she is a girl and force her to work as a sex worker to feed her siblings because she is an orphan and has no other work opportunities, these structures obstruct the glory of God. This is not to say that the girl's life does not reflect God's glory, for nothing can stop the Creator from manifesting his/her love for creation. But the structures of the country in which she lives, and one may add the wider global structures of distribution of power and assets, fail to give glory to God by not providing conditions for the girl to live well. Working at making economic, social and political structures more conducive to human flourishing is constitutive of evangelization, of bringing the good news of God's revelation to the world. As a document of the Catholic Church, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, published in 1975 by Pope Paul VI, states: [7]

> [E]vangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized, about the rights and duties of every human being, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development. [...] The Church, as the bishops repeated,[8] has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings [...]. This is not foreign to evangelization. Between evangelization and human advancement there are in fact profound links. These include links of an anthropological order, because the person who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic questions (paragraph 6).

Divine and human

The Creed continues, 'We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary'. Christians believe in a God who is one in a communion of three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is not an undifferentiated monad but a differentiated unity of three persons in relation. If humans are

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[7] The document can be found at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/index.htm.

[8] This refers to the 1971 Synod of Bishops: 'Listening to the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures, and hearing the appeal of a world that by its perversity contradicts the plan of its creator, we have shared our awareness of the Church's vocation to be present in the heart of the world by proclaiming the good news to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted' (paragraph 6). The document can be accessed at http://www.osjspm.org.

made in the image of God, then the human being is fully human when living in communion with other people and at the service of each other. Belief in a triune God implies that the good of oneself and of the communion of people one participates in are mutually self-implicating, a point we shall return to in Part II. Christianity's relational anthropology is ill at ease with political traditions which emphasise the primacy of the individual, such as social contract theory and political liberalism, or ideological traditions which prioritize the pursuit of self-interest and individual utility maximisation as in neo-classical economics.

By affirming belief in a triune God, Christians hold that the provision of individual rights cannot be separated from the set of relationships in which people live, and which are constitutive of their lives. Restoring right relationships, restoring communion among human beings and re-adjusting the creation to its purpose, is the reason why God became human. The Nicea-Constantinople version of the Creed adds that Jesus became human for the forgiveness of sins. When humans lose sight of God, relationships are distorted away from the Creator's intentions. A search for power and domination takes precedence over service to one another, with all the consequences that sin entails: people going hungry because an economic structure allows financial speculation on basic commodities making food prices shoot up, or forces them to grow one single export crop which is vulnerable to price volatility; people dying at a young age because a political structure makes it possible for political leaders to buy weapons instead of invest in basic infrastructure (cf. part II). But Christians believe that Jesus came to reconcile human beings to God, and inaugurate a new Creation, a new world no longer corrupted by sin.

For God to share the human condition, beginning from life in the womb to death, the cooperation of a woman was needed. God asked a poor, young and unmarried Jewish girl if she would agree to bear the Son of God (Luke 1: 26-38), to be the channel through which God could become human (John 1: 14). Mary accepted and was asked to name her son 'Jesus'.[9] God needed the agency of a human being in order to be revealed. Christians believe that, because God became flesh through Mary's yes to God, followers of Jesus are called likewise to make the Word of God flesh in their lives, be totally open to God and let their lives be transformed by the power of God.

Soon after accepting to bear the Son of God, Mary sings the Magnificat (Luke 1: 46-56),[10] which proclaims that God sends the rich away empty, throws down the mighty from

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[9] The name Jesus comes from the Hebrew Yaheshua or 'God saves' (Johnson, 2003: 114).

[10] The Gospels were written after the experience of the Resurrection. By echoing the Song of Hannah (1Samuel 2: 1-10), Luke insists on the radical transformation implied by letting God enter one's life.

their thrones, and scatters the proud-hearted. Accepting God in one's life reverses power relations and questions the existing economic, social and political order (Johnson, 2003:160). Being a Christian, accepting God's revelation to the world through Jesus, implies making a judgement on the existing economic, social and political arrangements and the extent to which they reflect God's glory.

Death and resurrection

The Creed jumps from Jesus' birth to his death: 'He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead'. The Creed is silent on Jesus' public ministry, and goes straight to its consequence: Jesus' revelation of God to humankind enters in conflict with worldly authorities. His ministry has disturbed authorities of the Jewish Temple. He has performed miracles on a Sabbath day, is not observing Jewish purification practices, eats in the houses of publicans and prostitutes, has thrown merchants out of the Temple and criticized some Pharisees for being hypocrites. Jesus is a threat to the religious establishment, which subsequently accuses him of blasphemy, an offence condemnable by death in Jewish law.

The Jewish authorities bring Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor who has the power to condemn or release Jesus, but Pilate finds no basis for condemnation – Jesus is not a rebel whose kingdom will overthrow the Roman occupation – and offers to release him. But some of the religious leaders have manipulated the crowd to demand Jesus' crucifixion (crucifixion was the most shameful way of dying at the time). Pilate fears for his own career, and the rebellion that might erupt should he release Jesus. He lets the crowd decide and washes his hands of the matter (Matt 27: 24).

It is no coincidence that Mary, Pilate and Jesus are the only three human beings named in the Creed (Johnson, 2003:159, 168). Mary and Pilate offer the two contrasting responses that humans can give to God: Mary, a poor and marginalized woman, accepts God and gives birth to Jesus; Pilate, a wealthy and powerful man, rejects God and kills Jesus. We can see here a glance of the 'option for the poor', which is a key feature of a Christian perspective on development (cf. part II). God is on the side of the oppressed and marginalized.

The opposition between Jesus and Pilate narrates a key aspect of Christian discipleship: following Christ and proclaiming God's reign may bring conflict with political authorities, sometimes to the point of death. One of the most well known examples is that of Oscar Romero.

Oscar Romero was appointed archbishop of El Salvador in 1977. He had never been heard making political statements about the social conflict that was engulfing the country. He was considered psychologically weak and easy to manipulate to suit the interests of the religious and political elite. But Romero did not continue to be as he had been before his appointment. A few weeks after becoming archbishop, a friend of his, a Jesuit priest, was murdered because of his support for land reform, along with two children and a man to whom he was giving a lift. It was the first time that the military dictatorship had killed a priest. The event profoundly transformed Romero. He began to make regular radio broadcasts critiquing the military dictatorship. How could Catholic soldiers kill their brethren? How could the Salvadorian elite go to Mass, say they love God and deny food, shelter and basic human needs to their brothers and sisters? That was a message too hard for some to listen to. Romero, like Jesus, was troubling the existing social and moral order, and had to be silenced. He was murdered whilst saying Mass on 25th March 1980.

The Creed professes that Jesus died and was buried. He lived fully a human life. However, Christians believe that death is not the end because Jesus has risen from the dead. The Resurrection is the core of the Christian faith. St Paul wrote that if Jesus is not resurrected, faith is without substance (1 Corinthians 15, 13-19). Jesus now shares the glory of God and his resurrection prefigures the new creation, when all will be one in God. Christians live in the hope that justice, a world of communion between God and all creation, will come about at the end of times, when 'Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead', as the Creed affirms. Until this happens, Christians are accountable to Christ (Johnson, 2003: chapter 6). The standard to assess whether their lives have been good or not is whether they have reflected God's glory, whether they have worked at making relations among people and with the environment more just, more in tune with their created purpose.

The church

Those who profess the Christian faith often fail to live up to the standard described above. Some abuse children or hurt their spouse through unfaithfulness, neglect or lack of respect. Some fail to speak out against injustice. Some live lives which are more resource-intense than the environment can sustain. This names only a few of the many discrepancies that one can observe between what Jesus taught and lived and the way Christians live. Related to this failure of Christians to be disciples and to re-enact Jesus' life in their own, the Creed continues: 'We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.' The Holy Spirit

brings human beings into communion with God. Christians believe that God's revelation did not end with Jesus' death, but continues in the world through the Holy Spirit, who ceaselessly renews the human 'spirit' and transforms it in the likeness of God (Johnson, 2003: chapter 7).

When the human spirit understands Scriptures as a justification of human dominion over creation, of slavery, of women's subordination to men, God sends the Spirit so that human beings may interpret Scriptures in a way that better conforms to God. In its Catholic interpretation, Christian doctrine holds that the Holy Spirit can speak through each human being, irrespective of faith, for God speaks through the human conscience.[11] Thus, an atheist young man who refuses to join the draft in a war he sees as unjust, at the risk of imprisonment, or an agnostic person who makes public a case of corruption at the risk of losing her job, can be examples of the Spirit of God at work through conscience.

Even if in many respects the community of people who profess the Creed fails to reflect God's glory, the Church, or the assembly of people gathered to proclaim their belief in the triune God and to remember the life of Jesus who revealed God, is a sign of God's presence and redemption in the world. Christians believe that it is through the Church, although not exclusively, that God continues the work of revelation. When Christians profess in the Creed their belief in the 'holy catholic Church', they do not believe in the Catholic Church headed by the pope in the Vatican, but believe that God works through the whole of the community – 'catholic' means in Greek 'throughout the whole' (Johnson, 2003: 268-73).

The church may be called 'holy' because it springs from God's revelation to humanity but remains sinful because its members are sinners. This is why Christians believe in the role of the Holy Spirit in continuing God's work, transforming the human spirit to become more Christ-like. God was revealed in Jesus, but humans will ever grasp only a fraction of that revelation, and will grasp it through their own narratives, contexts, social norms, and all sorts of influences, whether consciously or unconsciously. God continues the work of revelation throughout history to open people's eyes to sin through the action of the Holy Spirit.

The interpretation of what it means concretely to be a disciple of Christ may be as diverse as there are Christians. However, the Catholic Church, headed by the Pope, has developed over the centuries a set of principles which are expounded in numerous encyclicals, or papal documents, which analyze various situations such as labour exploitation, injustice,

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[11] The Pastoral Constitution of the Catholic Church, *Gaudium et Spes*, issued at the Second Vatican Council in 1965 states that it is in their conscience that humans are 'alone with God', that it is 'in fidelity to conscience' that 'Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals form social relationships' (paragraph 16).

inequality, nuclear deterrence, financial speculation, political authoritarianism, global trade, from the perspective of God's revelation to the world. This body of teachings is known as Catholic Social Teaching, and is addressed not only to Catholics and Christians from other denominations but 'all people of goodwill'.[12] The second part of the paper examines the specific understanding of international development found in that teaching.

Part II A Christian perspective on international development

Integral human development: material and spiritual

For Christians, 'development' is the process through which people reach their fulfilment in God and live the purpose for which they have been created: to reflect the image of God.[13] As the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, published by Pope Paul VI in 1967, stated: 'To be authentic, [development] must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each person, and the whole person' (paragraph 14). The human being and her wellbeing should be the end of all economic, social, and political processes. This implies that human dignity, giving people what is their due as human beings, is a key principle in a Christian perspective on development.

If a child dies of an easily preventable disease because of lack of adequate public health provision, human dignity is violated. If a girl is unable to pursue secondary education because of lack of adequate public education provision or is forced to stay at home to care for younger siblings, human dignity is violated. If a woman is unable to take time off work when ill and risks dismissal because of inadequate labour rights, human dignity is violated. If workers are prevented from being union members because their country fails to respect freedom of association and freedom of expression, human dignity is violated. If people are denied the right to vote for the person of their choice and protest against policy decisions they disagree with, human dignity is violated. In other words, promoting human rights is a central feature of respect for human dignity, and Christians have a duty to protect economic, social, civil and political rights and to speak out whenever they are violated.[14]

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[12] For a pedagogical introduction to Catholic Social Teaching, see www.virtualplater.org.uk. All the documents of the Catholic Church cited in this paper can be accessed on the Vatican website at www.vatican.va.

[13] For the international development implications of the creation of human beings in the image of God, see the report *Wholly Living* by theology think tank Theos and evangelical and Catholic development agencies Tearfund and CAFOD at http://www.cafod.org.uk/resources/policy/wholly-living-report2.

[14] The *Compendium on the Social Doctrine of the Church* writes that human rights are 'one of the most significant attempts to respond effectively to the demands of human dignity' (paragraph 152).

With its affirmation of the centrality of human dignity and respect for human rights, a Christian perspective on international development bears many similarities with what is known as the human development paradigm, publicized by the UNDP in its annual Human Development Reports and conceptually rooted in the works of Amartya Sen. It considers development as 'a process of expanding people's real freedoms – their valuable capabilities – and empowering people as active agents of equitable development on a shared planet' (Alkire, 2010). The end of development is to provide opportunities for people to reach their potential as human beings: to be educated, to be healthy, to be creative, to participate in the life of the community, to engage in relationships, to live in a peaceful environment, to enjoy nature, to express themselves, to make decisions about their lives, etc.[15]

Despite the many similarities between a Christian and human development perspective on development, there is one fundamental difference. Christians affirm that the human being finds ultimate fulfilment in God. The pursuit of social and economic wellbeing is essential to human development, but not sufficient. To recall the above definition, economic and social development should have the development of each and the *whole* person as its end. Christians believe that humans become more human when they are closer to God. To reflect this reality, Catholic Social Teaching refers to integral human development.[16] The development of the whole person is not complete without spiritual considerations.

One could argue that the human development perspective is open to the transcendental or spiritual dimension of life, for respect for human rights includes respect for freedom of religion (article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). However, by affirming that humans find their ultimate fulfilment in God, a Christian perspective does much more than adding another dimension to development alongside the social, economic, cultural or political or dimensions. It introduces a different anthropology which leads to a different understanding of the very concept and meaning of development.

For Christians, the spiritual and material dimensions of life are inseparable. Christians believe that eternal life, when humans will be with their Creator, is the end of human progress. As the latest document of Catholic Social Teaching, *Caritas in Veritate,* issued by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009, puts it:

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[15] See Sen (1999), Nussbaum (2000, 2011), Alkire (2002), and Alkire and Deneulin (2009).

[16] Other Christian denominations tend to refer to 'integral mission'. The evangelical development organization Tearfund defines integral mission as the 'indivisible proclamation and demonstration of the gospel that results in the transformation of the whole person'. See http://www.tearfund.org/About+us/Integral+mission.htm.

> Without the perspective of eternal life, human progress in this world is denied breathing-space. [...] Institutions by themselves are not enough. [...] Development requires a transcendent vision of the person, it needs God: without him, development is either denied, or entrusted exclusively to man, who falls into the trap of thinking he can bring about his own salvation, and ends up promoting a dehumanized form of development. (paragraph 11)

This inseparability of the material from the spiritual dimension of life introduces a fundamental difference between a Christian and non-Christian perspective on international development at two levels: humans are called to be in communion with each other and God, and human actions are marked by sin.

The call to communion: solidarity and responsibility

Christians believe that God is a communion of three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that humans have been created in the image of God. As a consequence, they believe that human wellbeing will reflect an analogous communion. The good of each person depends on the good of their communion which in turns depends on the good of each. The principle of the common good is another key feature of a Christian perspective on international development.

The common good is a good shared in by all those who are forming a certain community. It is the good constituted by the relationships of people with each other. The principle of the common good holds that the good of the community formed by these relationships and the good of each individual are mutually implicating (Hollenbach, 2002).[17] The Catechism of the Catholic Church, issued by Pope John Paul II in 1992, affirms that the common good is the end of political authority, the reason for which it exists (paragraph 1910). The role of government is to provide the conditions through which the good of all and each can be secured.[18] Christians are called to speak out whenever a government fails to fulfil its role of providing the conditions in which the good of all can be secured.

A country which fails to have a minimum wage legislation or sets it so low that parents have to keep two jobs to afford food and housing, not only violates the principle of human dignity (by failing to give decent employment which enables a decent living) but also the principle of the common good (for long working hours do not facilitate family relations and leave much time for workers to participate in the life of the community). A country which encourages a work culture of long working hours through tax incentives, violates the principle of the common good too (for it discourages people to spend more time with family and

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[17] For a discussion of the common good, see Deneulin and Townsend (2007).

[18] For account of the role of the government from a Christian perspective, see Townsend (2009).

friends or participate in community matters). A government which has a regressive tax structure and makes basic social services provision according to the ability of users to pay violates the common good (for it undermines the duties of solidarity citizens have to each other).

The common good is best realized in a context of subsidiarity, that is, a context in which decisions and actions are taken at the most local level whenever possible. The principle of subsidiarity was first asserted in the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, published in 1931 forty years after the first papal social encyclical: '[I]t is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of the right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought to its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them' (paragraph 79). The latest encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* defines subsidiarity as 'first and foremost a form of assistance to the human person via the autonomy of intermediate bodies (paragraph 57). Christians thus neither support an all encompassing state which denies people the freedom to act for themselves and others in civil society, nor do they support a state which leaves it up to individuals to do what higher associations do best such as providing public goods. Waste collection may be organized by a local association of neighbours because of state failure to provide such services, but this goes against the principle of subsidiarity for the municipal government is the entity best responsible for providing such public good. Homeless care may be taken in charge by state-run organizations but the state should not prevent community initiatives from providing shelter and companionship to homeless people. Doing so would go against the principle of subsidiarity.

The principle of the common good is bound up with solidarity and responsibility. Commitment to the common good is synonym for solidarity. The encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, issued by Pope John Paul II in 1987, defines solidarity as 'this firm and constant determination to work for the common good; that is, for the good of all and each because we are all responsible for all' (paragraph 38). Christians, by virtue of following Christ who throughout his life opted for the poor, oppressed and marginalized of his time (such as women, publicans, tax collectors and blind people) and restored their dignity as full members of God's people, have a special responsibility in building structures of solidarity in the world and ensuring a better distribution of power and resources. The Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt relief was an illustration of this Christian commitment to solidarity. The campaign brought together a large coalition, mainly of churches and other Christian bodies, demanding the cancellation of the debt of heavily indebted countries so that more resources could be freed to

provide basic services instead of servicing the debt and enriching Western banks. The pastoral land commission in Brazil is another example of the involvement of Christians in constructing a world more in harmony with God's creation through demanding a fairer distribution of land.

Solidarity is a virtue which is obviously not specific to the Christian faith. Many seek to build a more equitable world without reference to God. There is however a distinct aspect of a Christian perspective on solidarity. Christians justify solidarity in their belief in the existence of God. God is the creator and ultimate end of human life. Humans are united in a common origin and destiny and share a universal brotherhood (or sisterhood!) in Christ. Goods are destined to be enjoyed by all, and those who have goods have a duty to share with those in needs. From the principle of the common good, a Christian perspective on development affirms the principle of the universal destination of material goods. Christians hold that private ownership of goods is not absolute, as the 1967 encyclical on international development, *Populorum Progressio*, stated:

> Every one has the right to glean what he needs from the earth. […] Created goods should flow fairly to all. [Therefore] 'the right to private property is not absolute and unconditional. […] The right to private property may never be exercised to the detriment of the common good. […] When private gain and basic community needs conflict with one another, it is for the public authorities to seek a solution of these questions, with the active involvement of individual citizens and social groups (paragraphs 22-3).

The papal document *Octogesima Adveniens*, issued in 1971, even advocates that those who have goods in abundance should give them up: 'In teaching us charity, the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due to the poor and the special situation they have in society: The more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others' (paragraph 23).

While a Christian perspective on development shares a lot with the human development approach, its conception of the human person as reaching fulfilment in God introduces a more 'integral' or 'wholesome' vision of human development. For the human development approach, the good of each human person is determined by a process of public reasoning and democratic deliberation (Sen, 2009). The end of development is to enable people to live a life they have reason to value, to promote valuable freedoms, and it is up to deliberative processes to determine what these valuable freedoms could be The human good, what constitutes the development of a person, is what people decide through a public reasoning process.

For Christians in contrast, the human good is sharing God's life. The process of public reasoning is oriented towards this. From a Christian perspective, the exercise of human

freedom (for example in democratic participation) cannot be dissociated from the horizon of the common good and the purpose for which humans have been created, to reflect God's glory. The 1987 encyclical by Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, conceives of freedom and responsibility as two sides of the same coin: 'In order to be genuine, development must be achieved within the framework of solidarity and freedom, without ever sacrificing either of them under whatever pretext' (paragraph 33). The human being is fully free to the extent that he or she is responsible for others. Thus, one could imagine a deliberation process where people come to the agreement that a valuable life is one that is chosen and that the government should provide the conditions for people to live a life of their choice, whether it means working 15 hours a day in a business and enjoy a lavish lifestyle or take early retirement and spend one's life surfing on a beach. This political liberal account is perfectly compatible with the human development approach (see Nussbaum 2011). However, from a Christian perspective, a deliberation process which leads to that outcome violates the common good and de-links freedom from responsibility towards others. A life oriented to the satisfaction of one's own good only is not a Christian one.

This articulation of human freedom towards the horizon of the common good characterizes a Christian perspective on international development. This brings us to a second difference of an anthropological order between a Christian and non-Christian perspective on development: human freedom may have been given by God to manifest his/her glory, but humans often fail to orient their freedom towards God.

Sin: Transformation and hope

Human freedom is not always exercised for the purpose of the common good. Christians might use their freedom against the principle of the common good and failed to share what they have with those in need. This is why a Christian perspective on development does not ignore the reality of sin, of humans using their freedom against God and their own fulfilment, and connects the reality of injustice and material poverty to sin. That some people lack the material conditions to live well is connected to other people lacking of openness to God and failing to love God and live in solidarity with fellow human beings. The moral poverty of some has consequences for the material poverty of others, as the 1967 encyclical on development by Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, states: 'What are less than human conditions? The material poverty of those who lack the bare necessities of life, and the moral poverty of those who are crushed under the weight of their own self-love' (paragraph 21). Because some are

'crushed under their self-love' and fail to love God and live in solidarity, others suffer. Because rich landowners refuse to redistribute their land, millions of landless peasants suffer.

The human being is a unity of body and soul, and the transformation of the material world is bound up with moral transformation, as the latest Catholic encyclical by Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, affirms:

> The question of development is closely bound up with our understanding of the human soul. [….] Development must include not just material growth but also spiritual growth, since the human person is a 'unity of body and soul', born of God's creative love and destined for eternal life. The human being develops […] when he enters into dialogue with himself and his Creator. […] There cannot be holistic development and universal common good unless people's spiritual and moral welfare is taken into account, considered in their totality as body and soul (paragraph 76).

That poverty and injustice are the result of sin, or more specifically structural sin, has been a key point made by liberation theology. Gustavo Gutierrez (1971:174) writes that 'sin is evident in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of humans by humans, in the domination and slavery of peoples, races and social classes. Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of situation of injustice and exploitation'. The numerous sinful actions of individual human beings create a structure of sin, which in turn influences the behaviour of individuals. When numerous individuals are motivated by the prospect of maximum profit and returns on their capital investment and not the wellbeing of workers, this creates an economic structure in which the logic of profit-making has priority over the wellbeing of workers, often leading to their exploitation for the sake of maximum profit-making. The sinful actions of individuals have created a structure of sin, which then imposes a sinful behaviour on economic actors who support the structure. It is very difficult for anyone who has a bank account not to have money invested in an economic structure which privileges profits at the expense of the wellbeing of workers.

The notion of structural sin advanced by liberation theologians has become part of official Catholic Social Teaching, notably in the 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* by Pope John Paul II: 'Structures of sin are rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove. And thus they grow stronger, spread, and become the source of other sins, and so influence people's behaviour' (paragraph 36).

Structural sin differs from individual sin in three respects (Deneulin et al., 2006). First, structures of sin generate the experience of an impossible choice. The person who lives in structural sin is driven to undertake actions that s/he may disapprove of (it is difficult to avoid

having a bank account in a bank which invests in companies which subordinate the wellbeing of workers to the profit-making). Second, structures of sin may generate a sense of blindness (is one aware of the fact that holding an account in a high street bank contributes to a structure of sin?). Third, structures of sin are persistent and difficult to change (as a small customer, how can one change the investment portfolio of a bank?). A single individual action is not sufficient to change the structure (my individual action put my money in a cooperative bank which only invests in cooperative enterprises is not likely to make the global economic system oriented to the wellbeing of workers). Overcoming structural sin requires a collective turning away from sin and coming back to God – although the action of one single individual can be prophetic and be an inspiration for others, such as single individuals buying shares in a bank in order to attend the general assembly and confront the senior management with their sinful investment practices.

A Christian perspective on international development emphasizes the inter-connectedness of human actions. What some people do has a considerable effect on the lives of others. This is especially manifest in the case of environmental degradation. The 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* issued by Pope John Paul II underlines this:

> Equally worrying is *the ecological question* which accompanies the problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it. In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day. Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. […] Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him (paragraph 37).

A Christian perspective on international development does not reduce development to a material project of changing structures, for development is 'integral'. As important as it is, establishing structures more conducive for people to live well has to be accompanied by moral transformation, by a 'change of heart'. Development is also about people being more Christ-like. This lengthy quote from the latest Catholic encyclical, issued by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009, *Caritas in Veritate* summarizes this best:

> Man is constitutionally oriented towards 'being more' (paragraph 14) […] [W]hat does it mean 'to be more'? Paul VI answers the question by indicating the essential quality of 'authentic' development: it must be 'integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man'. Amid the various competing anthropological visions put forward in today's society, […] the Christian vision has

the particular characteristic of asserting and justifying the unconditional value of the human person and the meaning of his growth. In promoting development, the Christian faith does not rely on privilege or positions of power […] but only on Christ, to whom every authentic vocation to integral human development must be directed. *The Gospel is fundamental for development*, because in the Gospel, Christ, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals humanity to itself. Taught by her Lord, the Church examines the signs of the times and interprets them, offering the world what she possesses as her characteristic attribute: a global vision of man and of the human race. […] Integral human development on the natural plane, as a response to a vocation from God the Creator, demands self-fulfilment in a transcendent humanism which gives [man] his greatest possible perfection. […] The Christian vocation to this development therefore applies to both the natural plane and the supernatural plane; which is why, when God is eclipsed, our ability to recognize the natural order, purpose and the 'good' begins to wane. (paragraph 18)

Economic, social, political or technological means are not sufficient promote development. Development cannot be reduced to a man-made enterprise. It is also a journey of conversion, of coming back to God, for there is a causal relationship between sin and injustice. Working at providing the conditions in which each human being can live in dignity, at guaranteeing the respect of human rights, is a moral task. A vision of development which ignores the transcendental dimension of life, risks being dehumanizing.

Conclusion

Religion is unavoidable in development. Yet, engaging with it brings serious challenges. A Christian anthropological vision of the human is at odds with a secular anthropology. For the former, being human is being open to God, and the exercise of freedom is set within that horizon. For the latter, being human is to exercise freedom and reason without God. However, conflict need not be the outcome of two different visions. Openness to the other, and therefore entering the other person's point of view and understanding of what it means to be human, is of paramount importance when engaging with religion in international development.[19]

A Christian vision of development does not separate the material from spiritual dimension of life. Christians believe that humans are made in the image of God and only reach their fulfilment in God. Development, working for social justice and protection of the environment, goes hand in hand with conversion of heart. From a Christian perspective, the origin of injustice, inequality, exploitation and destruction of the environment lies in human beings turning away from God. It lies in failure to love; it lies in lack of solidarity, in greed, in

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[19] Cf. chapter 6 'Dialoguing Traditions' of *Religion in Development*.

search for power and domination over creation, in lack of respect for the dignity of each human being.

From a Christian perspective, the aim of development is not make the world Christian but to reveal the face of God and restore communion between human beings and creation. Non-Christians do show solidarity with fellow human beings, serve them, respect God's creation and live a life turned to God (often even more than professing Christians!). This is why the Christian perspective on international development outlined here is not relevant for Christians only. It is universal and holds for every person of goodwill (to whom the documents of Catholic Social Teaching are addressed).

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