

DEVELOPMENT AND EVANGELIZATION

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I am delighted to greet you and I thank you with all my heart for your welcome, for the joy you give me in being here today to share this moment of reflection and dialogue. Meeting as friends and siblings, brothers and sisters one and all, is always a cause for joy, but to be able to do so here, with you, in this land that is so rich in nature, traditions, and culture, is a special occasion for me to praise the Lord and to magnify his goodness.

I have been asked to explore the relationship between evangelization and development. So how can we understand "development" in the light of the Gospel? What happens if we set aside what "development" development means for governments, financial interests and industries, and instead insist on making it a direct consequence of the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ? This broad, complex and important topic varies according to the particular context in which it is applied.

Let me highlight how the Church in Congo is called to undertake "evangelization and development" now and in future. Let us recall some of the cornerstones of the Church's social teaching, beginning with (1) the major turning point that took place at Vatican II in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. I will then outline (2) some of the developments that followed in the magisterium of the pontiffs after the Council, up to (3) the current contribution of Pope Francis. Given the realities that you are facing here, I will then mention (4) four great challenges -- poverty, health, environment and education -- and conclude with (5) evangelization.

Please receive these words as a sign of closeness and encouragement to walk together as the Church, in a synodal style, trusting that the Lord Jesus is in our midst and never abandons us.

1. The Prophetic Wisdom of *Gaudium et Spes*

The first aspect that I would like to emphasize in *Gaudium et Spes* is that, among all the arguments offered by the Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II, there emerges overall a renewed ecclesial awareness, which has matured in the laborious attempt to read history in the light of the Gospel. The Council Fathers understood that, to focus on the task of proclaiming the Gospel in the contemporary world, it was necessary to lay out a theological anthropology, a vision of the human person that is in line with Scripture and Tradition, that interrelate Person, Society, and the Gospel.

The Word of God, fully revealed in Christ, is the font of the affirmation about the dignity of the human person and the fundamental equality among all people. This is the truth that God revealed in the Incarnation of the Word: human beings are created as "worthy" of God the Father's love; redeemed through love in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection; and led by the Holy Spirit to the full possession of eternal joy.

Then, the joy and hope of the Church is that God's saving plan for humanity will be fulfilled as soon as possible, and that the Kingdom of Heaven will become manifest even now, in our present age.

The Council Fathers concluded that in order to inspire real progress or development in humanity and in the relations between nations, it was indispensable to start afresh from the proclamation of the fundamental dignity of the human person and to defend the rights of the human person and of peoples.

The Council Fathers identified two "polarities in tension," on whose dynamic relationship the pursuit of the common good depends: namely, the person and society. On the one hand, one pole is the human person, referred to as the "beginning, subject and goal of all social institutions" (*GS* 25). The other pole is the social order, which "must be founded on truth, built on justice and animated by love; [and] in freedom it should grow every day toward a more humane balance" (*GS* 26).

The fact that *GS* chose to emphasize this "interdependence" (as in *GS* 25-26) is deeply and really "prophetic": such a tight reciprocity connecting person and society. And it is the Gospel which verifies, purifies and renews this dynamic interrelatedness.

From the mandate received from the Risen Lord to proclaim this Good News all over the earth derives the specificity of the Church's action in the world: to be a "yeast" that leavens the dough, a presence that tirelessly works at the service of the entire human family, so that every human person "may have life and have it in abundance" (Jn. 10:10).

2. The Post-Conciliar Magisterium linking Evangelization and Human Development

In the wake of the Council, the Encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) further emphasizes the profound link between evangelization and human promotion.

Any faith that distances itself from its vital contact with reality, the practice of charity, and the promotion of justice, falls into idealism and degrades into a disembodied doctrinal option. However, evangelization cannot be reduced to identifying effective strategies to counter

inequalities; rather "it must envisage the whole man, in all his aspects, right up to and including his openness to the absolute, even the divine Absolute" (*EN* 33).

By means of *Populorum Progressio* (1967), Paul VI consolidates this point of view, encouraging the Church to become aware that the "the demands imposed by Christ's Gospel" (*PP* 1) require her to place herself at the service of humanity and to intervene with concrete acts of solidarity.

In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) John Paul II further underlines the concept of development. It needs to take a moral direction (Cf. *SRS* 33), so that it is guaranteed to all (Cf. *SRS* 39).

Centesimus Annus (1991) brings to the world's attention how poverty is manifest nowadays: shortages of food and shelter, the exploitation of labour, lack of access to health care and education, and so forth. As long as human dignity is abused, there will be a lack of "bread" to nourish every person.

In *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), Benedict XVI faces the well-established reality of globalization, sketching how the new global imbalances have resulted from the economic unification of the planet.

The pope's criticism aims at reviving the principle of *subsidiarity*, as a particular manifestation of charity, of love for others, because by leveraging the autonomy of intermediate bodies, it helps them to develop their own capacities and to realize themselves, making them fully autonomous (Cf. *CiV* 41).

3. Pope Francis's Social Magisterium

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Francis critiques globalization all the more directly. We are faced with an entirely new phenomenon: "Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded" (*EG* 53). The dominant technocratic paradigm, which is also economic and finally political and cultural, inevitably generates the throwaway culture.

The logic of consumerism has imposed the ideas "product" and "merchandise" on everything, and for every "benefit" a due "price" must be paid. It does not matter whether it is the poor, or the environment, who pay the highest price. It does not matter if it involves the deterioration of primary resources and the exploitation of men, women, and children. As long as this happens far away, perhaps on another continent, and does not directly interfere with the lifestyles of those who can afford to "buy" without thinking about the consequences, everything can be cynically considered as unavoidable "collateral damage" (*LS* 49).

In *Laudato si'* (2015), Francis critiques the "technocratic paradigm," i.e., that reductionist approach aimed at measuring and managing reality only from an economic perspective, so that all technological development is oriented toward profit. To this, Francis responds: "by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion" (*LS* 109). It is necessary to seek new paths, to change our approach, to rethink progress, and to rebuild a shared humanity, a "we" instead of "us and them", to inhabit our common home and care for it. This is essential in light of the principle of the universal destination of goods,

In *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), Francis states that the "throwaway culture" needs to be replaced by the "culture of encounter", animated by deep sentiments of friendship and brotherhood, in order to build a more just society. There is a close link between inequality and violence: various forms of coercion are deemed permissible to maintain asymmetrical relationships that take from many and give to a few. But fraternity presupposes equality. In this light, we must rethink relations between people, between individual and society, and between nations. "A firm belief in the common destination of the earth's goods requires that this principle also be applied to nations, their territories and their resources" (*FT* 124). We are obliged to ensure whatever is necessary for the integral development of every human person and of all peoples, including future generations. The Church expresses this pastorally in her preferential option for the poor. Every Christian is called to fulfil his or her social responsibilities as a witness to the primacy of Christ's charity.

4. Challenges for the Congolese Church Today

I would now like to highlight some challenges wherein today the Church in Congo can try to adhere to the Gospel and to face reality. I do not pretend to tell you "what to do" -- no one knows better than you what obstacles stand between your people, and justice and peace. Rather, as although now a guest and still a foreigner, my eight years of ministry in Africa introduced me to the great potential as well as some limitations of this boundless continent.

I intend to proceed with genuine "realism" with respect to the history of evangelization in your country, avoiding any sort of mystification of the past. The proclamation of the Gospel in Congo-Brazzaville happened in conjunction with the colonization process under Belgium. Today, the ambivalence of this historical fact, which is filled with both darkness and light, calls us to look at the past through a decidedly critical and objective lens.

As in the Gospel parable, the wheat and the weeds grow together, but it is not possible to separate one from the other without harming the harvest. Perhaps it is still too early to initiate a process of historical review that would lead to taking stock of the past, in order to discern wisely and in balance between gains and losses, between seeds of good and works of evil.

On the one hand, the risk could be to build today's identity on hatred for the misdeeds of the past, or to remain imprisoned in a self-perpetuating resentment and fall into a victimhood that dissipates all energy.

On the other hand, not distancing oneself from the abusive excesses of colonialism would lead to reproducing attitudes of dominance and subservience, indulging a sense of devaluation, of inferiority. One might then think that it is the responsibility of others to get a handle on the problems.

To look forward and chart new paths, one must always be aware of the road already travelled. Naming the reality of violence is part of this process. The purposeful impetus that enables one to stand up again and move forward expeditiously, on one's own legs, comes from trusting oneself and one's own abilities, but also from knowing that one is accompanied by God's love that goes before us and guides us and forgives us and also our oppressors.

a) *Poverty*

Safeguarding Africa's future requires a people-centred version of politics and economics that has as its common goal, first and foremost, the eradication of poverty. We must not, however, silently pass over the onerous and unbearable fact that getting out of poverty is still far from reality. Colonialism re-presents itself in new forms, including the crushing burden of international debt, unfair terms of trade, and excessively harsh conditions imposed by structural adjustment programs.

The continuing deterioration of the economic and social situation, the perpetuation and spread of poverty, are exacerbated by systemic problems, such as inadequate agricultural techniques, as well as the labour crisis, characterized by excessively low wages and unfair contracts or none at all. The discrimination faced by women, due to a patriarchal cultural legacy that relegates them to a subordinate and servile position, goes on seriously handicapping the country's progress.

Scientific knowledge and new technologies need to be put at the service of the basic needs of Congo's population. To this end, the role of young people in development is indispensable. Giving them the opportunity to be properly trained and equipped with the tools necessary to take up new job opportunities is a pressing priority. Their promotion includes the enhancement of girls and young women, with equal rights and dignity and the opportunities to study.

There is an urgent need to arouse hope among the poor, youth, and women, so that they become protagonists of their social progress. Young people should be more involved in decision-making and exercising making political choices, with a view to the future. Here, the Church must show her maternal face, supporting aspirations and accompanying authentic human development.

b) Health

A second aspect to be examined is that of health, which should be considered as an indicator the broader and more generalized picture of politics and civic life. Evangelization has made a significant contribution in increasing medical care, in making it accessible to so many indigent people. Many of these structures are still service in Congo, although they are subject to strong criticism because their approach is judged too "paternalistic" and inadequate in the face of the real needs of local populations. This is a reproach that must be taken seriously and that must lead us to reflection and assessment.

The problem of the lack of basic health services, with the consequent persistence of endemic diseases, should be addressed, starting with the concerted will of the international community to intervene in order to remedy the situation. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how the issue of health today needs to be rethought on a global scale because, as *Laudato si'* states, everything is connected, and according to *Fratelli tutti*, everyone is connected, too.

There are indicators that constantly challenge us, such as, for example, rising infant mortality, or problematic access to drinking water, or substandard hygiene. Nor can we forget the grave injustices committed against the elderly, orphans, the disabled and the sick who, increasingly, are abandoned by their families.

To face these endemic problems, a political class must form that is up to the task, capable of recovering the best of ancestral traditions and integrating it with the principles of "efficient governance". Good governance leads to cooperation, which in turn implements basic services. Many men and women are needed to devote themselves seriously to the common good and exemplify moral rectitude, resistant to the temptations of corruption and self-interest.

The country's political stability, and also broadening the representative base of its different social components, are essential elements for promoting development. Peace is often confused with unanimity or a tranquillity that is imposed by threat and force, ensuring that small groups retain power at the expense of the entire population. Inevitably, citizens become disinterested and disengage. True democracy, which safeguards human dignity and promotes the common good, is an indispensable condition for development, and a fruit of it as well.

The involvement of the lay faithful in political life and leadership is essential in order to introduce lived Gospel values into civil society. Moreover, it is of paramount importance that policies be established and remain intact despite the succession of one government after another.

c) *Environment*

The degradation of creation, including the loss of biodiversity, is closely linked to poverty and, more remotely, colonialism. We need to be attentive to the forms of threat that arise today from the reckless and inequitable use of environmental resources. In particular, extractivism is taking on alarming proportions. It extracts resources to the point of depletion. This benefits a few elsewhere, while harming the local environment and population.

The aggressive and uncontrolled exploitation of nature, along with the deteriorating climate, are causing an increase in the number of migrants, internally displaced persons, and refugees, in addition to those who flee war. As in a chain reaction, this causes the resurgence of various expressions of violence, social tensions, and incidents of racism. Today's worsening migratory crisis is an opportunity to address the root causes which displace many within Africa and force others to flee to Europe.

The Church is called to act together, in a synodal style, first and foremost by spreading a culture of respect for our common home. For the cry of the earth echoes that of the least of our siblings, the excluded. The Church has a human and holy notion of progress. Let's call on business and politics to direct us towards better choices that promote integral human and environmental development.

d) *Education*

Isn't education the promising key to the previous three, as well as building up the Church? Catholic schools have given the opportunity to access literacy and education to many people throughout the Congo, in rural areas as well as bigger centres. This work was carried out with passion by many religious institutions who made an extraordinary effort in facing considerable difficulties, including the variety of local languages and dialects.

At the same time, the work carried out by missionaries in the educational sphere also involved the imposition of "alien" cultural forms, sometimes with little respect for native customs and traditions. Until recently, evangelization seemed tainted by the idea that bringing Christ to the nations also meant "civilizing" the peoples to whom the proclamation was being addressed.

Overcoming the identification between Western culture and the Gospel has occurred only recently in the history of the Church, with *Gaudium et Spes*. The conciliar ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium* has allowed us to rethink the identity of the Church as unity in difference and, consequently, also the way of conceiving its missionary nature, in order to see it in terms of inculturation.

Pope Francis is very attentive to this important topic and has repeatedly stressed how God's Revelation reverberates on every people, just as light refracts on the multiple facets of a polyhedron

(EG 235). The *Final Document of the Synod for the Amazon* rejects "a colonial style of evangelization," because to proclaim the Good News is to recognize that "seeds of the Word [are] already present in cultures" (FD 55).

Catholic educational institutions present in Congo should not renounce their educational task, nor the confessional specificity that makes them distinct. However, a careful examination of the forms to be adopted is necessary in order to facilitate the encounter between culture and the Gospel, with appreciation and full respect for the identity of peoples.

It is part of the task of providing adequate education to prevent any form of particularism, extremism, or religious fanaticism, which induces ethnic claims, violence, and conflict.

Under the aegis of education also falls the appropriate preparation of seminarians, priests and deacons, men and women religious, and catechists who play a leading role in Christian communities. The confession of faith in God the Creator, which leads us to recognize that all human beings are equal in dignity, must be accompanied by the commitment to spread an authentic spirit of brotherhood. It is a priority to move from mere tolerance to esteem for others, to respect for each one's rights and duties, and to ensuring freedom of conscience, religion, and worship.

5. Evangelization

So how is the Church to proclaim the Gospel in a Congo that is still marked by injustice, suffering and sin? How are you to cope with the excesses of the technocratic paradigm and ill-effects of globalization? In short, how are you to be faithful to the Lord's commandment and offer the Church's contribution to development, justice and peace?

By starting afresh from Christ, the fullness of life, our peace and our justice, our "hope" (1 Tim. 1:1). And by starting afresh from the poor, beloved children of God and living icons of Christ, for real change in human heartlessness and unjust structures starts again from the poor. Let the human family in Congo be "moved with compassion" as the Good Samaritan was (Lk 10:33). For an evangelical social consciousness develops when compassion moves us to work for the rescue of our most fragile siblings, our most damaged common home.

St. Paul reminds us to make our goods available to others (cf. 1 Tim 6:17-19), and that includes are time, talents, good name, etc. Not coercively taking away what belongs to others, but ensuring that fairness (equity) always obtains, so that "Whoever has much does not have more, and whoever has little does not have less", so that the plenty of some can make up for what others lack (cf. 2 Cor. 8:13-15).

It is the encounter with Christ, not an ideology or sociology, which generates the preferential option for the poor.

Let's recover compassion and solidarity, and express them daily. Let's develop real development. Let's generate responsibility and mutual accountability between the individual, society, the state, and the religions.

I pray that, for the Church's ongoing mission of evangelization and development in Congo, you can start again from Christ and from the poor, finding in them all needed confidence, courage, hope and joy.

Thank you.