

REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF CARITAS EUROPA

MAINZ, GERMANY 2006

WORKSHOP ON The principles of the Common Good and Sustainability

The Working Group focused on the principles of the Common Good and Sustainability within the context of Catholic Social Teaching.

PART A)

Reflections from a Caritas Perspective

Paolo Beccegato – Caritas Italiana

The Common Good principle

- implies not to disregard the requests received from partners. However, the starting point should always be the local needs.
- calls us to overcome the risk of becoming only skilled managers of solidarity. We should instead give a new relevance to the spiritual side of our work, frequently drawing from God's Word a real source of inspiration.
- recalls also the notion of fundamental Human Rights, the perception of need and development covering all aspects of human life: physical, psychological and relational in its material and spiritual sense.
- involves as well the idea of Man, seen not only as an individual but also as a part of community, which in turn has an impact on the way projects are designed and carried out.

The Sustainability principle

- means to refuse any form of giving alms without allowing the people helped become self-sufficient. It means to take into account the needs of future generations and thus, to find the balance between social justice and the protection of the earth's natural resources.

- means to resist the feeling of frustration and being powerless as the needs/demands exceed, by far, our means as organisations. Caritas has to respond in terms of improving its strategic planning, defining better criteria and setting priorities owing to needs.

To promote the principle of the Common Good and Sustainability, Caritas' projects and initiatives should aim at:

- Democratic participation in respect of the cultural, political, economic and social life, in Europe and elsewhere
- Environmental protection
- Disaster preparedness
- Protection of minorities
- Peace promotion and reconciliation

In essence, in pursuit of the Common Good and Sustainability the task ahead for Caritas and its projects is to draw attention to the construction of peace, and to foster education in a way that the dedication to the common welfare will prevail over the pursuit of personal interests/advantages. Caritas also has a role to play in the political arena when it comes to denouncing policies which contribute to a further division of society by generating advantages for the rich at the expense of the poor.

PART B)

Catholic Social Teaching and Sustainability

Dr. Werner Veith, University of Munich

Catholic Social Teaching – Rationale

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) deals with the life of mankind under the aspect of his social conditions. Therefore, societies structures, norms, institutions and common structures like the Economic Model or the Political Model are the reference point for its normative analysis driven by the methodology „to see“ – „to judge“ – „to act“. Thus, as a first step, CST is keen on detecting developments within a given society, which might threaten the dignity of mankind. Secondly, CST has to develop a set of ethical instruments which - based on relevant norms and principles – allows judgements of certain problematic developments. Finally, CST aims to propose concrete measures to overcome such structural conflicts.

1. From the Social Question to the Ecological-Social Question

It was explained by Dr. Veith that in history, the Church had been challenged to formulate ethical positions in direct response to concrete problems encountered in society. For instance, the social question was a result of the process of industrialisation in the 19th century. Within this context, CST began to take shape as a justice driven search for an economic and social model led by social principles like Personality, Solidarity and the Common Good. In 1931 – with the World Economic Crisis emerging – these principles have been further amended by the principle of Subsidiarity (*Quadragesimo anno* (Pius XI., QA). Since the end 1960s, the social question bears more and more relevance on a global scale, as in many states the fundamental social and economical rights are not respected. However, according to Dr. Veith, it cannot be stressed enough that transforming the social question to a global social question would insufficiently describe the present crisis scenario as the ecological dimension cannot be further neglected (e.g. climate change, scarce natural resources, use of risky technology). Hence, the challenge is now to respond to a global ecological-social crisis. In keeping with Kurt Becks explanation, the current process of transformation could be described as moving from a state of industrialised society to a state of „industrialised risk society“. The characteristic of the former being that the potential of risk immanent to the industrial processes was limited to local environment, its social impact and time-bound; the characteristic of the latter being that the potential of risk is unlimited and thus, may also determine the conditions of future generations.

2. Sustainability in the Political Domain

Since the 1990s politics has tried to respond to this scenario by adding the term sustainable development - publicly introduced for the first time within the Brundtland-Report 1987 / (*Our Common Future*) - to their guiding principle. Within the Brundtland-Report, justice between generations was introduced as a new normative perspective, combining the global social question with ecological dimensions which broadens out to future generations. The UN conferences in Rio in 1992 and Johannesburg in 2002, are seen as further cornerstones in embracing the concept of sustainability, underlining the ecological, economical and social dimensions for development. Within UN documents the concept of sustainability is marked by the following principles:

- a) Networking between different sectors of society (Economy, Social System, Ecology)
- b) Protection of the global environment
- c) Rights to development of southern hemisphere countries
- d) Solidarity with future generations

3. Sustainability in selected Church documents

In 1997 the EKD (Protestant Bishops Conference of Germany) and the DBK (Catholic Bishops Conference of Germany) issued a joint document/declaration „For a Future in Solidarity and Justice“ with the following core elements:

- Underlining that Solidarity and Justice are not time-bound to one generation.
- Favouring structural change with an emphasis on the ecological dimension of economy
- Stressing that the concept of sustainability is rooted in biblical foundations in particular in the Theology of Creation (Gen. 1,26–28; 2,15).

Later that year the DBK published another document, called „Acting for the Future of Creation“ which further expanded on the above mentioned relevance of the ecological dimension. Sustainability here is understood as an achievement deriving from the persons responsibility based on a solid understanding of the Theology of Creation, and an anthropocentric view which is spelled out in terms of responsibility towards Good, for one self, society and creation at large. Three criteria for acting in a responsible fashion are outlined:

- (1.) environmental compatibility – aiming at securing our natural resources
- (2.) social compatibility – oriented on principles of Solidarity and the Common Good (which also considers concerns of future Generations)
- (3.) individual compatibility – with its focus on the anxiety of men for themselves, the realisation of needs and the concerns for a life in happiness.

4. Sustainability as a new principle of CST

In addition to the already well known traditional principles of CST, Dr. Veith introduced Sustainability as a complementary principle in order to arrive at some transparent and relevant criteria for our action towards sustainable development. Nature, Networking and Time are referred to as the three categories and new ethical dimensions which help demonstrate this more concretely.

(1.) The Dimension of Nature

The ecological crisis demands a new approach to nature and to the way we deal with our natural resources. The precondition here is a relationship between men and nature which respects both the dignity of men and the value of nature. The latter meaning that the value of nature does not lie only in becoming the instrument of mankind in pursuing his goals and objectives. The discussion around the issue of the right fishing quota and the exploitation of non-regenerative natural resource may serve here as an example.

(2.)The Dimension of Networking

Within modern societies, the ongoing process of differentiation causes problems in integration. The principle of Networking demands an integration of the different systems of economy, politics, and science for the purpose of a comprehensive development process of society at large. For this development process to take shape, the dimension of nature in the above sense is of particular importance. Therefore, the ecological dimension has to be added as a core element to the overall process of integration as many scientists, - when describing the root causes of the ecological-social problem - point to insufficient Networking. A few concrete examples may provide evidence to this position:

- (a) The different sectors or systems of society should not be allowed to exist in isolation without feedback and control mechanisms in place. This allows for the measurement of the impacts of their development on other systems or sub-systems of society as well. Development in the field of economy, like the transfer of jobs to foreign countries, must be measured against the potential consequences for social stability of a given country.
- (b) Regionalisation can be regarded as an appropriate political approach to limit the range of power of a certain sector or system of society. For example, the closer a consumer gets to his local market - if he knows which region and which farmer he purchases his agricultural products from - the less anonymous the European Common Market gets. Regionalisation in this sense allows for the detection of responsibilities and, in times of occurring problems, referring these problems to the right people.

(3.) The dimension of time (inter-generational Justice)

Some crisis phenomena are characterised by the fact that they contain a potential threat which is not limited by the factor of time. This in turn raises normative questions with regard to inter-generational justice. Under the aspect of anthropology the inter-generational justice is trying to bring the Past, the Present and the Future into balance. The concept advocates for an equal rights based approach for all generations concerned. Present generations rights/opportunities should not outweigh or diminish the rights/opportunities of future generations. Some concrete examples that underpinned this statement:

- (a) Some constraints or even damages done on the living conditions of the next and future generations would already need to undergo a normative control system today. Environmental Protection, State Debts and the Reform of our Social Security Systems are concrete examples of this.
- (b) Next and future generations would need to be granted the same or at least equitable minimum standards of Human Rights and health and living conditions as those who are benefitting presently.

- (c) Decision-making processes in State and Society would need to be untied from their focus on the present, and structural incentives that also consider the future perspective, would need to be created.

PART C)

Catholic Social Teaching and the Common Good

Stefan Wallner, Secretary General for Domestic Affairs, Caritas Austria

Stefan Wallner-Edwald for his part was interested in revitalising the term of the Common Good for the debate as Common Good and Sustainability are perceived as being similar concepts. The term Common Good focuses on the structural aspect and envisages the totality of society. So does Sustainability but it also adds the time component to this concept. The term Common Good is preferred over the term Solidarity as the latter is more associated with a relationship between individuals.

For Caritas Austria the following questions arise:

- Where can the actors for the Common Good be found in society?
- Where do we still find levels of government which are functioning and exercising their power well?

Thematical challenges for Common Good/Sustainability as perceived by Caritas Austria:

- Education: The social class of the family determines, to a large extent, the path to be chosen in the educational system for children
- Migration: Migration is denied although it is a political fact. The consequence of this being that a real policy of integration is not put in place.
- Labour Market: Large groups are laid-off and stay unemployed; those are less qualified people, people with physical disabilities or psycho-social problems. Hence, how do we find new forms of employment and participation in the life of society which fit these people?
- International Development: Caritas here subscribes to a concept which – in the phase of delivering aid – is aiming at support local structures. Unfortunately, this paradigm is not followed by all actors.

How then, can society define and arrive at realising the Common Good?

As a point of clarification it shall be noted at the beginning that the term Common Good is not to be confused with the term Equity.

According to Stefan Wallner-Edwald the Common Good can be achieved by trying to bring into a balance the necessary demands for equity with the demands for difference.

Each society is challenged to strike a balance of these two principles when it comes to finding answers (practical solutions) to important questions such as:

- How much value do we attach to equity and how much value do we attach to difference (the right to differ) when it comes to regulating how we live together in a multi-cultural and multireligious society?

It was further stressed by Stefan Wallner-Edwald that the intention of finding the right balance is ultimately connected to responsibility for one-self, for our neighbour(s) and for society at large, which implies both an individual and structural perspective. Another example is the following:

- Since the War on Terror broke out, Security has gained more and more importance as an element in defining the Common Good and citizens, living under the threat of terror, seem to favour Security at the expense of their civil-political rights. It is well acknowledged that civil-political rights need to be preserved as a point of legitimacy of our democratic order. However, it should also be noted that one needs a minimum of Security in order to be able to exercise these civil political rights and take responsibility.

From here, the conclusion was drawn that in trying to define the Common Good under the present signs of the time, Equity and Difference, as well as Freedom and Security, must be regarded as core elements and any attempt to strike a fair balance between them needs to be done in a responsible manner.

PART D) DISCUSSION

In the discussions following these presentations Stefan Wallner-Edwald held the opinion that the political and economic system are benefitting from results which their system cannot generate (Solidarity, for instance). If more and more people are made jobless by the economic system, this has a negative impact on society's well-being where these resources are generated. The most threatening scenario is that of a civil-war, if inequalities in a given society are becoming too many. Therefore, the question arises how are these powerful sources in society kept alive? In this context the term of „Social Sustainability“ was introduced.

The debate also questioned the term of „Social Sustainability“ as it does not provide sufficient evidence as to what it is referring to: Does it imply the sustainability of social

security systems or does it rather refer to the value base and spiritual sources of a given society?

Discussions were also held over the principle of Solidarity. It was pointed out that the approach to Solidarity is not only limited to the individual. A structural approach to Solidarity is possible, as many state structures like the Health System and the Pension and Retirement System clearly demonstrate.

Panelists to the Workshop

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Mainz, 19.05.2006
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