Integral Human Development: the fuller picture

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Introduction

Integral Human Development is in vogue. In January 2017, Pope Francis merged the competences of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People and the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers *ad experimentum*. The new dicastery (Vatican ministry) is called the Pontifical Council for Promoting Integral Human Development.

The clue as to why the Pope has done this is in the *Motu Proprio* announcing these changes where he states, “In all her being and actions, the Church is called to promote the integral development of the human person in the light of the Gospel”.¹ This article seeks to shed light on what Integral Human Development actually means, theologically and practically, for the Caritas family.

IHD and Caritas Agencies: part of the Catholic Social Thought Tradition

In the context of Caritas agencies, we tend to think of Integral Human Development (IHD) as a different, Catholic form of development but with similarities to other names for development such as sustainable development or rights-based development. While integral human development incorporates many of the features of both sustainable and rights-based development, it has a very different provenance based on a Catholic view of human anthropology and values intrinsic to the human person and posits a more rounded view of what development means for the poorest within their cultural and religious Weltanschauung.

It is therefore important to place IHD in its full context within the Catholic Social Thought tradition. This tradition includes the magisterial documents which detail Catholic Social Teaching (CST) principles but includes also the works of those thinkers who complement Papal documents with other perspectives based on the same theological foundation. This is necessary, partially because there is no comprehensive teaching on Integral Human Development *per se* and partially to include the experience of Catholic development agencies and the voices of those from differing cultural contexts in the contemporary world, especially those from outside Europe and North America.² They can offer new ideas drawn from the social sciences, contextual theologies and experiential learning. As Saint John Paul II wrote in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*,

> Church social teaching is not built on a certain development theory. Rather, it represents a reflection on the social situation from the perspective of moral theology and is offered as a guide in the search for new roads to development.³

Integral Human Development is not, then, a new development theory but builds on the best community development practices while adding insights from Church teaching and the lives of the poor. The Catechism of the Catholic Church presumes that, while holistic development “reduces dire poverty and economic exploitation”, it also “makes for growth in respect for cultural identities and openness to the transcendent”.  

**History of the Term ‘Integral Human Development’**

What we now refer to as Integral Human Development as a term was first indicated (but not actually used in so many words) by Blessed Pope Paul VI in his 1967 ground-breaking encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (Progress of Peoples or On the Development of Peoples), whose 50th anniversary we celebrate this year: “Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man [sic] and of the whole man”. He then goes on to bolster this with a quote from “an eminent specialist” (in actual fact the first drafter of the encyclical), Louis-Joseph Lebret OP, the French Dominican social scientist who distinguished between ‘having more’ and ‘being more’, shifting the emphasis from an externality to an inner transformation. The Pope also calls this ‘authentic development’ which must include openness to the transcendent. The stress is on internal change in both ‘beneficiary’ and the person intervening in the life of the poor through development programmes, not solely on economic growth or other external matters.

**IHD: from a Caritas Perspective**

A summary of integral human development as understood from the perspective of a Catholic aid agency would include the following aspects.

Development has to uphold the innate dignity of the human person. It is not limited to economic growth but is to be holistic covering all spheres of life – the economic, political, cultural, personal and spiritual. It should promote the dignity of the human person and the common good. Saint John Paul II said that there was no ‘developed’ or ‘underdeveloped’ country or people. In a sense, we are all underdeveloped because we lack complete authenticity in our lives. It is connected to the Christian idea of human freedom which, in the Second Vatican Council document, *Gaudium et Spes*, is “strengthened by accepting the inevitable constraints of social life, by undertaking the manifold demands of human relationships, and by service to the community at large”.

Development is a transition from less human conditions to more human ones. The preferential option for the poor means that the poorest should have priority and they should be the subject of their own development, not the object of someone else’s idea of how they

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should be developed. That requires maximum participation by the poor in everything affecting their community and where subsidiarity becomes a way of promoting initiative.

Development is, in Blessed Pope Paul VI’s phrase, ‘the new name for peace’. Peace is understood not merely as a cessation of violence but is intimately connected to justice – a series of right relationships between human beings, between human beings and God, between human beings and all creation. Core to that ‘new relationship’ is the realisation that we are ‘stewards’ not ‘owners’ of creation. In Pope Francis’s latest encyclical on care for our common home, *Laudato Si’*, he uses the phrase ‘sustainable integral development’, connecting care for the planet forcibly with care for human beings in their economic, social and spiritual contexts, castigating an economic system that both destroys the planet, thus making it unliveable for future generations, while reifying workers.8

**Ethics, Development and Culture**

This viewpoint based on Catholic values agrees with the theories of Denis Goulet, one of the fathers of development ethics along with Lebret. Goulet wrote about ethics placing “each discipline’s concept of development in a broad evaluative framework wherein development ultimately means the quality of life and the progress of societies expressed in various cultures”.9 He insisted that the nation state was the essential actor in the process of development which transformed a neoliberal view of development to one where economic growth was oriented to human progress; there was equitable distribution of the fruits of growth; non-elites participated in decision-making and implementation; ecological responsibility was exercised; and where there was respect for traditional cultures, values and institutions in implementing development processes.10 Elsewhere, Goulet stresses that “Culture, not economics, technology or politics, is the primordial dimension in development”.11

‘Culture’ is understood here as ‘common meaning’ where a community, in Lonergan’s words, “is an achievement of common meaning”.12 It follows that the destruction or diminishment of culture means a loss of meaning for the people in whose lives NGOs have intervened. A loss of meaning can result in a lack of societal cohesion deleterious to the wellbeing of a community. This is of special importance in those communities suffering from the lack of agency which extreme poverty brings in its wake. It is recognised that culture can contain non-liberative elements such as the oppression of certain groups of human beings, notably women and girls, the unborn and the disabled, but culture is also dynamic and not held in aspic and can be, as the former President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, said of

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religion, “an important driver of change, even as it could be a break to progress”. Applying principles of CST to culture can bring about transformation of society as well as of self.

**Catholic Social Teaching and the African Context**

As with all principles of CST, integral human development changes slightly in differing situations and different contexts. The documents are, after all, “principles for reflection, the criteria for judgment and the directives for action which are the starting point for the promotion of an integral and solidary humanism”. To take the example of sub-Saharan Africa, where 50% of the world’s poorest people live, IHD has to take account of African philosophies and world views. Leading African theologian, the late John Mbiti, wrote, reflecting the views of African theologians from all over the continent,

> It is religion, more than anything else, which colours their [the Africans’] understanding of the universe and their empirical participation in that universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious universe. That is the philosophical understanding behind African myths, customs, traditions, beliefs, morals, actions and social relationships.

He further noted, speaking of the African worldview,

> Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: ‘I am because we are; and since we are, I am’. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man [sic].

Caritas agencies in their development work must not only take into account *Ubuntu* (as this sense of the importance of community is generally called) but the risk of putting individualism before community. The error of beginning from what ought to be rather than what is should be avoided. According to one African theologian, many Africans state that they “do not appear to feel that their ‘being modern’ requires them to be single individuals whose life

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17 Ibid.
18 The South African White Paper on Welfare, where Ubuntu is officially recognised as : “the principle of caring for each other’s well-being and as a spirit of mutual support. Each individual’s humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through a recognition of the individual’s humanity. Ubuntu means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the right and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being”
choices are essentially determined by their own private circumstances and desires”. 20 Values rooted in a religious faith can also be motivational factors in social change and community development. The universal values from CST of human dignity, solidarity and the common good with its traces of the philosophy of Ubuntu are markers of Integral Human Development and can be used as resources to effect real change within an acceptable cultural compass. The same can be stated in differing cultural contexts for all areas of the world where Caritas works.

**IHD transforms the power balance between development worker and so-called ‘beneficiary’**

It is also important to note that Integral Human Development signifies not only a change in the so-called beneficiaries of any developmental enterprise but also a transformation of the development worker towards the beneficiary resulting in a radical empathy. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI’s first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love), published in 2005, is most explicit in putting this forward. He writes, after stating that Catholic aid agencies such as those in the Caritas network need to employ competent people to assist the afflicted, Yet, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church’s charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a “formation of the heart”. 21

Pope Benedict continues to say that development workers should have a “heart which sees” while also stating that such work “cannot be used as a means of engaging in….proselytism”. 22 The Pope writes further of development workers,

> My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift. 23

This view of the radical empathy that must be felt by a development worker can be seen as part of a Christian commitment but also finds resonance in thinkers such as Brazilian educationalist, Paolo Freire, who writes in the preface to Denis Goulet’s book, *A New Moral Order: Studies in Development, Ethics and Liberation Theology*,

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22 Idem #31c.

23 Idem #34.
For the prophet [i.e. development worker], it is not enough merely to speak the name of those who cannot speak: he or she must make a commitment to the cause of those who have no voice. The prophet struggles along with them so that all of them speak.\textsuperscript{24}

Integral Human Development includes this aspect of formation of the development worker as being radically empathetic and seriously taking on the preferential option for the poor rather than someone who is merely carrying out a task. It is about mutuality and reciprocity, a meeting and a sharing of humanities where the barrier between ‘giver’ and ‘recipient’ is broken down and a new relationship created which generates an authentic partnership of mutual learning and mutual empathy. An IHD approach then results in change in terms of power between the so-called beneficiary and the development worker.

**IHD and human fulfilment**

Finally, it is important to stress that IHD does not only refer to overcoming dehumanising poverty or even the promotion of ‘human flourishing’. It is CST’s term for “the human fulfilment that God intends for all persons” and refers to “the end or goal of people becoming as fully human as possible in all the dimensions of their God-given humanness”.\textsuperscript{25} The integral human development of any person is found in using their abilities to participate in and foster the common good. This is why it is important in the programmes of Caritas at national, regional and international levels to include service by the beneficiaries to the community as a laudable aim.

**Conclusion**

It should be possible to ensure that all the points about IHD in this paper form part of any framework for either designing or evaluating a programme, as CRS, Caritas Australia and now SCIAF, no doubt among others, are doing. By incorporating IHD more fully into their work, Caritas agencies are also delving into the richness of the Catholic Social Thought tradition which has universal relevance and resonance. For the People of God (and those who share our ethos), using IHD within Caritas work and mores is also akin to both a homecoming in terms of integrity towards the identity of the Caritas and a sharing of new, deeper insights into the development of the human person. This will guarantee that integral human development in its plenitude is implemented to the benefit of the development worker as well as of the poorest of the poor whose innate dignity is assured, whose lives are enhanced and who gain agency over their own lives in a community and society while serving the common good.

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\textsuperscript{25} David McLoughlin, VPlater CST gateway, (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2014).
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