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THE CONTEMPORARY MAGISTERIUM ON POVERTY

Wilhelmina Tunu Mruma♦

The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA)

Abstract

Care for the poor is a mission which God has entrusted to us. As Christians, we have been singled out for this special mission of love for and service to the poor. Serving the poor entails creating awareness to them of knowing that they belong to the community. The aspect of sense of belonging is important for the poor as they have a danger of not knowing that they are part of the community. It is for this reason that this article deals with the understanding of poverty in the contemporary magisterium. Poverty is a condition which triggers the minds of the community members in every society that they have a duty to build interest to know, love and serve the poor. Knowing, loving and serving the poor consists of creating a fair and equal society in which everyone matters, making the rights of the poor recognized and protected, hence, promoting peaceful coexistence within and among people. The magisterium, as explained in this article, reminds us that everyone counts and all people ought to be given fair and equal opportunity regardless of status, culture, gender, religion, age or race.

Keywords: Church, Community, Magisterium, Poor, Poverty

Introduction

This article presents the teaching of universal Magisterium on poverty. It emphasizes that the world of the poor is not a good one,

♦**Wilhelmina Tunu Mruma, LSOSF** serves as Adjunct Lecturer in Social and Christian Ethics at the Centre for Social Justice and Ethics at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), Christ the Teacher Institute for Education (CTIE) at Tangaza University College and Marist International University College (MIUC), Nairobi, Kenya. She is a member of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church. She has just completed her Post-doctoral research at Boston College, USA. Email: tunumruma@yahoo.com

especially in the developing world where basic social services are not yet equally distributed. This kind of poverty is a social evil which retards the dignity of the poor. In his message for the *First World Day of the Poor* (19 November 2017), Pope Francis invites us to love the poor ‘not with words but with deeds.’¹ Indeed, it is in the poor that we love Jesus. Care and love for the poor is thus our vocation which reminds us that all we are and all that we do have to be marked by love. In responding to the call to love, this article addresses the concern of Vatican II on poverty. It also presents the teachings of some of the Popes. The reflection brings us to the notion that the Church is concerned not only with spiritual but also with social, economic, cultural and moral issues that affect the Church and society. In this perspective, the Church is determined to place humanity to restoration by eradicating poverty which dehumanizes them. Lastly the article presents poverty as explained in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* and some dialogue between some theologians.

Teaching of Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes* on Poverty

The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* understands human persons as created in the image of God with knowledge and love of God. They are given authority to rule over all creatures making use of them and meanwhile glorifying God (Gen 1:26-27; Wis 2:23). *Gaudium et Spes* gives inward communal nature of the human person which describes everyone’s life and growth as reliant on his/her company with others (Gen 1:27).² The Vatican II Council considers the suffering and the poor to represent the suffering Jesus. In this respect, the Church does everything she can to assist the people suffering from poverty for in them she strives to serve the needy Christ.³

Donal Dorr advocates that the words “and all peoples” were incorporated in to the statement after a long discussion to show that the Vatican II Council wanted to have the problems of the poor countries included not only just the poor individuals.⁴ Actually, the Vatican II Council Fathers wanted to eliminate evident inequalities as *Gaudium et Spes* states:

¹Message of His Holiness Pope Francis, *First World Day of the Poor*, Vatican (13 June 2017), No.1

²Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 12.

³Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (21, November 1965), 8.

⁴Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Social Teaching*, New York: Orbis Books, 1992, 155.

To satisfy the demands of justice and equity, strenuous efforts must be made, without disregarding the rights of persons or the natural qualities of each country, to remove as quickly as possible the immense economic inequalities, which now exist and in many cases are growing and which are connected with individual and social discrimination.⁵

The Vatican II Council further established three procedures of commitment to the poor. Firstly, authentic sharing of one's resources with the needy is necessary to get rid of their sufferings as supporting their development. All individuals and community are thus, agents and beneficiaries.⁶ Secondly, "the Church must walk on the footsteps of Christ on the path of poverty and obedience, service and self-sacrifice to the death from which he came forth, a victory by his resurrection."⁷ Thirdly, the issue of economic and social imbalances challenges the universal destination of earthly goods. Common destination of earthly goods is contained in the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World as the establishment of the special preference for the poor. The constitution asserts; "God intended everything to be used by all under justice and charity..."⁸

Poverty in Papal Documents: 1891-Present

Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*: On the Condition of Workers (1891)

Industrial revolution brought new poverty among the workers. People were used as means for achievement. The poor workers had nothing to use and sell apart from their ability to work. Their wages were low. The factory owners controlled the means of production. It is on this background that Pope Leo XIII wrote the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. He wrote this social encyclical as he strongly protested against the harsh condition of the workers. He intervened for the poor by responding to the unjust structures when many changes were taking place in the world particularly in Western Europe and North America. During this time new developments and techniques affected the relation between employers and employees. A few people possessed great wealth while masses of workers lived in destitution.⁹ Pope Leo XIII insisted on the care for the poor as well.

⁵Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 66.

⁶Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 79.

⁷Vatican II, *Ad Gentes Divinitus* (7 December 1965), 5.

⁸Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 69, 26.

⁹Leo XIII, The Encyclical Letter, On the Conditions of the Workers, *Rerum Novarum* (May 15 1891), 1. Cf: Richard N. Rwiza, "On the Social Question of Workers: An Analysis of *Rerum Novarum* and Its Application to the Contemporary Situation in Africa," *African Christian Studies* 30, 1 (March 2014) 22-44, 35. *Rerum Novarum* focuses on Social questions raised during the Industrial Revolution at the

He writes: “The Poor must be cared for, possess fruits of their labour, which is the just wage-enough to support their daily needs and the family at large.”¹⁰

Moreover, to bridge the gap between excessive wealth and deep poverty, Pope Leo XIII emphasised the need to help the powerless by encouraging them not to engage in social evils. His main concern was on the respect for the rights of the workers. He insisted on the need of workers to be given just wages and own private property. The right to possess private property is from God who intended all natural resources to be shared among all, especially with the underprivileged in the society.¹¹ The teaching of Pope Leo XIII in 1891 served as a remedy for the social question of the time.¹² For Pope Leo, poverty is a result of injustice. To eliminate this problem, people ought to fight the structures of injustices.

Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931)

The Encyclical letter *Quadragesimo Anno*¹³ discusses the achievements of the Church since the issuing of *Rerum Novarum*. Pope Pius XI states that the Church has put efforts not only to enlighten people’s minds but also to direct the life and conduct of people. Through *Rerum Novarum* the Church worked hard to uplift the workers whose equitable position in the society had been deprived of. In this way the Church responded to the cry of the marginalized.

According to Pope Pius XI, those in authority have a responsibility to protect the community and individuals’ rights. He teaches that the poor must be given special attention. His critical point is “social reconstruction” and the “common good.”¹⁴ Moreover, the renewal of humanity in the social life calls for the cooperation of all people of good will. Although Pope Leo XIII condemned the social evils in the

end of the 19th Century. During this time workers in Europe and North America were under great poverty. According to Pope Leo XIII there was a need to build a just society. The Church has a duty to ensure that the poor are assisted to enjoy a life worth of their dignity.

¹⁰Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 5-6.

¹¹Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 19.

¹²Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 13.

¹³Pius XI, Encyclical Letter, *Quadragesimo Anno* (May 15 1931): AAS 23 (1931), 177-228. It was issued to focus on the social order. It still reflects on the poverty caused by liberal capitalism. In spite of the teachings of *Rerum Novarum*, workers were still in deep poverty and the wealth was in the hands of few individuals. The working condition of workers was terrible. Pope Pius saw the importance of justice. He criticized the people who used religion to suppress the poor. He proposes justice led by love and prudence and he urges the state to promote the common good and social justice.

¹⁴Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 26-27.

Church and society, they still exist in the current era. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening. The wage earners are being subjected to the unkindness of the employers; fraud and corruption still take place. These social evils call for attention from the Church to play her prophetic role so as to seek their remedies.

John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (1961)

According to John XXIII the Church is mother and teacher of all nations in dealing with welfare of the human person. His emphasis is on economic development whereby he invites the nations to be responsible for the poor in developing countries. The Pope further urges the rural poor to put effort in agriculture and rural welfare. He also calls the state to safeguard the rights of all citizens particularly women, children and all workers.¹⁵

Pope John XXIII had intention of uplifting the situation of the poor. They are not to be exploited but removed from perpetual dependence through support so as to advance morally, socially and economically. This advancement is possible when the national wealth is shared equally to enable all people to lead a decent life. He asks the rich nations to assist the poor nations. The rich individuals are called to support the poor who are at their sides. He brings all people to an awareness that the created resources are to be used for the benefit of all since everything comes from the divine goodness.

Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967)

Encyclical Letter, *Populorum Progressio*¹⁶ points out the role of the Church in promoting integral human development and gives a Christian vision of development which cannot be limited to economic growth but which is holistic in nature.¹⁷ It views development as

¹⁵John XXIII, Encyclical Letter, *Mater et Magistra* (March 15 1961), 20. This encyclical was written to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. It was issued as a response to the severe imbalance between the rich and the poor in the world. Instead of putting emphasis on poverty within the industrial countries, Pope John XXIII focuses on international poverty.

¹⁶Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*. It was issued by Pope Paul VI in 1967 after the conclusion of Vatican Council II (1965). It is dealing with the International development and reflects the challenge of development while analysing the nature of poverty, its causes and consequences. It focuses on integral development at the global level to complement *Rerum Novarum* (RN) which was issued as a response to the harsh conditions encountered by workers during Industrial Revolution. Both Encyclicals promote the dignity of the human person. *Populorum Progressio* discusses the sequence of poverty and injustice brought by the imbalance of power between nations. He emphasised that the Church has a great role to promote a Christian idea of development. The Encyclical pronounces development as a new name for peace and it urges all Christians to struggle for justice.

¹⁷Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 14.

peace which comes as a result of economic planning that involves developed nations aiding developing nations, leading to international development. Its emphasis is on integral development, a development which promotes the good of every person and the whole person.¹⁸ The whole person here is not just physical and material needs, but involving all aspects and values of the person.

Populorum Progressio starts from the duty of each person to attain self-fulfilment and it implies human solidarity. The document gives a fresh approach to the understanding of development and a shift from national to international social justice. Although *Populorum Progressio* addresses the relationship between nations of the world and how they should help each other to bring about development, its content is relevant and applicable today.

The new understanding of development, namely integral development in which all people are called to participate in all aspects within the human community, brings a challenge to our way of interaction. I support the idea that development ought to seek the good of every person and of the whole person. It should come through education which liberates the poor by making them aware of how to handle their lives. Development should promote consensus, not confrontation. This perspective helps to address the dignity of every person and his/her obligation to attain self-reliance, hence reduce poverty.

Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971)

This Apostolic Letter was issued in 1971 by Paul VI to celebrate the 80th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* (15 May 1891) of Leo XIII.¹⁹ It is an open letter to Cardinal Maurice Roy, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace Commission. This document is a call to action for Christians to participate and contribute to solving many problems facing individual countries and the world. In other words, each person has to take part in decision making process instead of waiting for the Bishops to issue statements on what to be done. People are assisted to understand their problems as a step toward finding solutions. Understanding the problem is part of the solution. Thus, people have to be taught about this document so as to understand the evil of poverty and discern how to alleviate it. This Apostolic Letter has an inductive approach where discernment of the signs of times is encouraged for the community of believers in giving their opinions depending on different situations they encounter.

¹⁸Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 14.

¹⁹Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971), 1, AAS 63 (1971) 401.

Pope Paul VI, in this social document insists on social justice worldwide. He states that each Christian has a personal responsibility for building up temporal order. Christians have also the task of inspiring and innovating in working for justice.²⁰ Justice is a moral virtue which persuades us to respect others' personality and give them whatever is necessary for them, i.e. individuals who are responsible for their own life to achieve their destiny. As a familiar moral virtue, justice extends to the total observance of all God's commandments and it is seen as His mercy and gift of salvation. Justice therefore, signifies a perfect life of holiness which consists of true concern for the neighbour's welfare (Mt 5:20, 28:23).

Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificati* (1971)

Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio* insists on commitment towards the poor. This is based on awakening consciousness to the demands of social justice made by the Gospel and the Church, to help the poor to move from their situation. He also insists that, the use of goods must be restricted to the minimum required so that the remaining share may be given to the poor.²¹

Our vocation as Christians is to care for the poor and less fortunate in the Church and the society in order to assist each other towards the heavenly kingdom. As Disciples of Christ, our faith calls us to love our neighbours and strive for their wellbeing through performing our spiritual and temporal duties. Through these activities we participate fully in building the Kingdom of God by imitating Christ and continuing his mission in the Church and the world.

John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (1981)

It was issued in 1981 by John Paul II to commemorate ninety years after *Rerum Novarum*. It is a philosophical and theological discussion on human work. It insists on the subjective dimension of work, i.e. the person who does the work, the worker, not the work. It gives a spiritual dimension of work based on the participation in God's creation where a human being becomes a co-creator.

²⁰Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 48, 50.

²¹Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*: On Evangelical Witness (29 June 1971) 18. It is about the renewal of Religious Life according to the Second Vatican Council. Pope Paul VI notes that Christ identified himself and responded to the cry of the poor who are privileged children of God. For him, the evangelical witness of the Religious Life has to reflect to all people the priority of the love of God. This love calls the Religious and all people for a transformation of attitudes and hearts for liberation from all temporal burdens and handicaps.

The essence of this encyclical's doctrine is the human person reflected in the background of the experience of work. It insists that work is for the person, not the person for work, and labour has priority over capital in the sense that human labour takes precedence over the means of production.²² Labour is always a primary efficient cause while capital is an instrumental cause. John Paul II calls for a positive vision of human labour as a sharing in the activity of the creator, and the responsibility of each person to cooperate in the ongoing creation and re-creation of both self and the world.²³ The human person thus, needs to be placed at the centre of all social activities. He/she has to be respected as a human person, not as a tool of production. *Laborem Exercens* observes:

The error of early capitalism can be repeated whenever man is in a way treated on the same level as the whole complex of the material means of production, as an instrument and not in accordance with the true dignity of his work, that is to say, where he is treated as a subject and a maker, and for this very reason as the true purpose of the whole process of production.²⁴

To see the human person as a criterion, the centre and measure of all socio-economic issues, requires a transformation of socio-economic systems. They must focus on this person who is the worker. For John Paul II, work is the key for making life more human. He asserts:

Human work is a key, probably the existential key, to the whole social question, if we try to see that question really from the point of view of people's good. And if the solution or rather the gradual solution of the social question, which keeps coming up and becomes ever more complex, must be sought in the direction of making life more human, then the key, namely human work, acquire fundamental and decisive importance.²⁵

Work empowers the poor and it initiates self-confidence in them to compete in the economic development. According to St Pope John Paul II, "Work is a good thing for our humanity because through it we achieve fulfilment as human beings."²⁶

In the Arusha Declaration policy, work is viewed as a measure of humanity. According to this declaration there is no room for anyone to live by the labour of another. Those who can live on the work of others and who have the right to be dependent upon their fellow

²²John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* (14 September 1981), 12-13.

²³Patricia A. Lamoureux, "Commentary on *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work)," in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R. Himes, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004, 389-414, 389.

²⁴John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 7.

²⁵John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 3.

²⁶John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 21.

human beings include children, the elderly who cannot support themselves, the crippled and those to whom the state at any moment cannot avail an opportunity to work for their living. It observes: "Everyone who is physically able to work does so; every worker obtains a just return for the labour he/she performs, and the incomes derived from different types of work are not grossly divergent."²⁷

Apart from being a personal value, work transforms the nature and the society. The poor people have to be empowered through education which in turn will conscientize them to have a positive attitude toward work. This will make them enjoy the dignity they deserve as human persons and fulfil their moral responsibility of working for the good of their families and the entire society.

John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987)

It was issued in 1987 by Pope John Paul II to commemorate the 20th anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*. It was also meant to affirm the continuity of the social teaching of the Church and its constant restoration. It puts emphasis on solidarity, liberation theology, sinful structures within the society and the Preferential Option for the Poor. This Encyclical brings to our attention that authentic development is a gradual process which is centred on the human person. Authority and money ought to help people to realize their holistic growth. The Church has to spread the social doctrine in her mission of evangelization to all people. In proclaiming the Good News, she has to denounce the social evils that exist in the society.

John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* re-evaluates and describes the themes that were earlier treated by the Magisterium.²⁸ Preferential Option for the Poor is among the issues under discussion. Some realities facing humanity cannot be avoided. There are people without shelter, the hungry, the exploited working class and those without hope of a promising future are subjected to poverty. Such people cannot be ignored. In her social concern, the Church fights against poverty through preferential option for the poor. The Encyclical states: "The motivating concern for the poor ... must be translated into concrete actions until it decisively attains a series of necessary reforms."²⁹

Necessary reforms entail a spirit of solidarity. John Paul II in the Encyclical Letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* defines solidarity as "a firm

²⁷ Aganda Madyyibi, "The Arusha Declaration," <http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/nyerere/1967/arusha-declaration.htm> (accessed 16.4.2016).

²⁸John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 27.

²⁹John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 43.

and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, for the good of all and of each individual, because we are really responsible for all.”³⁰ The strength of solidarity is togetherness whereby a group of persons with common interests unite in intersubjective purpose to commit oneself to the common good. According to Michael J. Millar, “solidarity entails a sense of moral responsibility that helps us to see each other, whether a person, people or nation... as our neighbour and helper, as one called to be a sharer on a par with ourselves in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God.”³¹ Collaboration is thus, important for people to realize their goals. With this understanding, people ought to embrace this principle of solidarity as a moral expression to help the poor to know that they too have a duty towards transformation of their lives and developing their community.

Solidarity is not an emotion of unclear compassion, but a Christian virtue originated in the Trinitarian association.³² It is not just teamwork in a corporate project but a relationship established on the love of neighbour. As people practice solidarity, they ought to commit themselves in recognizing the moral consequences of their interdependence. When applied among the poor and with the poor, solidarity is perceived as a human and gospel imperative. As the wealthy practice it, it leads to a sense of duty towards the poor, searching for means to assist them. The poor and every individual ought to practice this virtue of solidarity so as to discourage passivity, inspiring everybody to contribute in all means required to the good of all.

To practice solidarity, people need to reclaim the cultural values of sharing, hospitality, honesty, and respect to allow participation of all members in agricultural and business activities to alleviate poverty. The initiation of group and personal projects for the benefit of all would help the poor to realize their economic and social growth. Once they are given opportunity to be creative in their work, they may be able to bring up their hidden talents and use them to improve their lives. This is a responsibility of the Church as Pope St John Paul II emphasizes: “By virtue of her own evangelical duty, the Church feels called to take her stand beside the poor to discern the justice of their requests and to help satisfy them.”³³ Pope John Paul II gives a

³⁰John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38.

³¹Michael J. Millar, ed., *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996, 421. Cf: John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 39.

³²John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38.

³³John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41.

challenge which needs our response in giving service to the poor. Through this challenge we need to be aware that Christ's message will be effective by life witness in actions than in mere words. We have to live what we proclaim without abandoning the poor through whom we identify Christ.

John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991)

This Encyclical was issued on 1, May 1991 by Pope John Paul II to mark the centenary of *Rerum Novarum*. He intends to honour the rich and vital heritage of *Rerum Novarum* and to apply its teachings to contemporary issues. In it Pope John Paul II emphasizes new evangelization as an ideal opportunity to contribute to the progress of Christian social teaching. He observes: "part of the responsibility of pastors is to give careful consideration to current events in order to discern the new requirements of evangelization."³⁴ John Paul II calls for a major new willpower to provide opportunities and he expresses his concern over the growing tensions and imbalances that exist between the rich and the poor, especially those of the developing countries which have even more serious conditions of poverty and want.³⁵

The encyclical seeks to offer an analysis of the economic and political changes in and around the year 1989. There was an economic shift toward market economies in Eastern Europe and deconstruction of the Soviet bloc or the fall of communism which was a result of violation of workers' rights, inefficiency of a command economy and the utopian idea to eliminate all evil. Generally, communism fell due to the spiritual void of atheism.³⁶ Politically, there was a move away from totalitarian or dictatorial regimes toward more participatory and democratic forms of governance.

Centesimus Annus provides a moral and theological response upon two paradigms of capitalism and democracy and their failed competitors, socialism and dictatorship. John Paul II criticizes consumerist culture and the tendency of capitalism to take unfair advantage of working people.³⁷ Consumerism harms families and the

³⁴John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 5, AAS 73 (1991), 798-800.

³⁵John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 21.

³⁶Patrick T. McCormick, "Centesimus Annus," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. Judith Dwyer, New York: The Liturgical Press 1994, 132-143, 132.

³⁷ Daniel Finn, "Commentary on *Centesimus Annus*: On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*," in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R. Himes, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005, 436-466, 436.

environment. He calls for “personal and institutional renewal.”³⁸ John Paul II points out that such systems and structures have to be grounded in the centrality, dignity and true social character of the human person who generates the correct picture of society. The encyclical further proposes that the state must respect a legitimate sphere of autonomy in economic life. It has to follow the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.³⁹ For John Paul II, proper freedom entails obedience to the truth.⁴⁰

Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009)

Benedict XVI emphasises that development has to be holistic. He argues that the general principle for authentic development of every person and of all humanity is Charity in Truth.⁴¹ According to Benedict XVI, development is a call from God. It is not just a profession.⁴² In this notion the poor are called for a responsible freedom in raising their living standards.

Furthermore, Pope Benedict XVI proposes a new financial directive. According to him the proper functioning of the economy requires people centred ethics. He denounces the attitude of the globalized economy which focuses on profit-at-all-costs. For him greed has lowered the economy. Such a habit escalates the level of poverty. In any circumstance profit is not to be earned by wrong means such as overcharging interest rates from people. Profit instead has to promote the common good as its ultimate end; otherwise it compromises wealth and creates poverty. The Church and society have to adapt this intensive new way of understanding business enterprise as Pope Benedict suggests.

Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus* (2011)

Pope Benedict XVI provides an African idea of life which recognizes life as a value that embraces and includes the ancestors, the living and the not yet born, the whole creation and all beings.⁴³ This proposed inclusivity calls all people to embrace the message of Christ and live in communion with him while appreciating the mystery of the Church and valuing human life and dignity despite the situation attached to it. Inclusivity enhances the protection of life

³⁸Finn, “Commentary on *Centesimus Annus*,” 436.

³⁹Finn, “Commentary on *Centesimus Annus*,” 436.

⁴⁰Finn, “Commentary on *Centesimus Annus*,” 436.

⁴¹Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*: Charity in Truth (29 June 2009) 1.

⁴²Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 16.

⁴³Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2011, 69.

of the poor through promoting certain elements of development for the integral growth of all people.⁴⁴

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013)

Evangelii Gaudium is an Apostolic Exhortation promulgated by Pope Francis on 24 November 2013. It was issued in response to the request of the bishops who attended a Synod on the New Evangelization in the world, held in Rome.⁴⁵ Pope Francis calls every person, nation, the community of nations and the Church to work tirelessly and ensure that the suffering of the poor is alleviated. He also invites everyone to become an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor and empower them to be agents of change in the society.

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* (2015)

Creation reveals the nature of God (Rom 1:20) and the environment is God's gift to humanity. As co-creators with God, we have a duty to make use of it while remembering the future generations. Benedict XVI in the Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth) upholds that, our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other.⁴⁶ In this manner we have a duty to care for one another by making the earth a good place to live in for everybody, especially through alleviating poverty which troubles people.

Pope Francis asks all people to care for the nature, our common home. The encyclical was issued on 24 May 2015. It has a profound ecological implication on Christian doctrine. It reminds us of our specific mission to look at what it means to be my brother's/sister's keeper. In other words, it invites us to be sensitive to the needs of others and live what we preach.

Depicting St Francis of Assis, Pope Francis provokes us to see what the nature means to us. He calls us to appreciate the beauty and value of the created nature, our common home where we commune with God, self and others.⁴⁷ In this social dimension we must nurture and enhance the loving hearts – love of God, neighbour and the things

⁴⁴Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 69-70.

⁴⁵This Synod was held in October 2012 before Pope Francis was elected as a Pope in March 2013.

⁴⁶Benedict XVI, The Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*: Charity in Truth, nos. 48, 51.

⁴⁷Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*: On the Care of our Common Home (24 May 2015), Città Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, no. 11.

God has entrusted to us. In this fact, we shall alleviate poverty since where there is loving heart there is care and sharing which will allow all people to co-exist in peace. We shall love others for who they are, not because of what they have.

Poverty as Explained in the Compendium

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church affirms:

Man is called to render justice to the poor, release the oppressed, console the afflicted while actively seeking a new social order in which adequate solutions to material property are offered and in which forces thwarting the attempts of the weakest to free themselves from conditions of misery and slavery are more effectively controlled.⁴⁸

The *Compendium's* concern on justice can help people to transform their poor condition of living.

St Thomas Aquinas provides the basic meaning of justice. While embracing the footsteps of Plato (428 -348 B.C.E) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E), Thomas defines justice as “the firm and constant will to give to each one his /her due.”⁴⁹ The due that is spoken about here concerns the rights that originate from the natural law. Charles Curran defines natural law as “the plan of God as mediated in human nature and reason by God.”⁵⁰ I agree with Curran that natural law contains the theological and philosophical aspects. In the theological aspect, the human person, particularly the Christian, finds moral wisdom and understanding in revelation/scripture, incarnation of Jesus Christ and in human nature as perceived by human thinking. The philosophical aspect deals with the understanding of human nature and human reason.⁵¹

Accordingly, Henry Peschke states: “People have rights not primarily because they have received them from the society, but their

⁴⁸Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2nd reprint, Città Del Vaticano: Libreria Edtrice Vaticana, 2010, 185.

⁴⁹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIe, q.58, a. 1; Cf. K.H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, Vol. 2, *Special Moral Theology*, Bangalore: Theological Publications India, 1994, 236.

⁵⁰ Charles E. Curran, “Official Roman Catholic Teaching,” *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. John F. Childress & John Macquarrie, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1989, 430.

⁵¹Curran, “Official Roman Catholic Teaching,” 430. Charles Curran notes that Vatican Council II brought a methodological shift in the CST documents. According to him there was a move from classicism to historical consciousness. Classicism observed the reality in terms of irreversible essential values of human beings and of the State and uses a deductive approach to provide ethical norms from these values. On the other hand the historical consciousness focuses on the historicity, progress and renewal and uses inductive approach, 430.

nature as human beings confers rights upon them..."⁵² This portrays that social justice encompasses relationships between individual, between individuals and the community and between communities.⁵³ Rendering justice to the poor thus, requires efforts to remove them from their miseries and uplift their dignity through giving equal services and realize solidarity by walking and working together in life.

Focusing on social justice, the Medellin Conference documents discuss about the church that is in solidarity with the poor. The Latin American Bishops declared: "The Church, the people of God, will lend its support to the downtrodden of every social class so that they might come to know their rights and how to make use of them."⁵⁴ This is a message which brought the pastoral renewal in Latin America. Moreover, the Medellin conference addressed the issue of poverty in a special way. It highlighted the shift from a position of support for the influential to a position of solidarity with the poor majority. Their message manifested a perception of salvation that denotes the necessity of constructing an alternative social order. Salvation is a realization of the kingdom of God which involves the liberation of all people, their progress from less human condition to a more human condition.⁵⁵

Conclusion

This article has presented the teaching of the universal Magisterium on poverty. It has highlighted the condition of the poor and the response of the Church towards raising the living standard of the poor. It has pointed out that collaboration is important for people to realize the goal of loving and caring for the poor whose life is not good especially in the developing countries due to unequal distribution of basic social services. It has also recommended the need of justice, a cardinal virtue which makes the social body to function well. There is also a need to focus on the social principle of human dignity as alternative ethical solution for poverty eradication.

⁵²Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, 235.

⁵³Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 118.

⁵⁴J. Gremillion, *The Gospel of Justice and Peace*, New York: Orbis Books, 1976, 45.

⁵⁵The Medellin Documents, *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council*, vol. 1, Position Papers, vol. 2, Conclusions, 2nd ed., Washington DC: U.S Catholic Conference, 1973, 23.