

Book Review

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Katarzyna Cichos, Jarosław A. Sobkowiak, Ryszard F. Sadowski, Beata Zbarachewicz, Radosław Zenderowski, and Stanisław Dziekoński, eds. *Sustainable Development Goals and the Catholic Church: Catholic Social Teaching and the UN's Agenda 2030*. London: Routledge, 2020. 294 pp. ISBN 9780367506353.

Abstract: Sustainable Development Goals and the Catholic Church is an exceptional effort to create a synergy between effective policy making and its implementation through the identification of convergent areas between Agenda 30 and Catholic social teaching in order to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This monograph puts forth the evolution of Catholic approach towards the contemporary realities of social life, and highlights superbly the potential of Catholic Church in achieving the goals set by Agenda 30. Through a panel of 55 authors of different scientific disciplines, this work aims to provide readers with a better, more intuitive outlook on and understanding the multifaceted nature of individual sustainable development goals.

Keywords: Sustainable Development; Catholic Social Teaching; Agenda 30; Religious Teachings.

The book, *Sustainable Development Goals and the Catholic Church: Catholic Social Teaching and the UN's Agenda 2030* with an Introduction, 17 chapters and a Conclusion has strong practical significance. Each of the chapters, prepared by a different research team comprising of members from various disciplines which helps the reader analyse each goal through different perspectives and scientific disciplines, address an individual sustainable goals in the order consistent with Agenda 30. The Introduction shows the relation between the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that

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focuses on the economic development of the people and the long tradition of Catholic Social Teachings (CST), that refers to the divine plan for people and planet.

The first chapter focuses on SDG 1: “End poverty in its all forms everywhere,” highlighting the importance of the clear definition of poverty in general and extreme poverty in particular, in tackling the global task of ending poverty across the globe, “leaving no one behind.” The Catholic Church in her teaching and ministries make a preferential option for the poor and work toward the eradication of poverty in all realms.

Chapter 2 investigates SDG 2: “End Hunger, achieve food security and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030” a goal that is close to the heart of CST. As SDG points to the possibility of achieving this goal, CST shows that it is morally imperative for all people of good will.

Chapter 3 is on “Health care as a personal and social asset” exploring the SDG 3 to “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” and the relevant CST, which treats health care in physical, mental and spiritual realms as part of the pastoral care of the church.

Chapter 4 explores “The role of education and activities of the Catholic Church and the need to promote sustainable development” aligning SDG 4 and Catholic Church’s active involvement in the promotion of quality education for all.

Chapter 5 focuses on “Combating legal and cultural forms of discrimination against women from the point of view of Catholic social teaching” and SDG 5: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” The chapter highlights the recognition and social appreciation of the unpaid care and domestic work of women and the issues involved in birth control, pre-natal care, etc.

SDG 6 is to “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.” Chapter 6 relates SDG 6 with the legal and ethical dimensions of this basic human right as part of right to life. The problems of the poor when it comes to lack of access to water is both a health problem and a moral problem for humanity.

Chapter 7 of the book discusses SDG 7, i.e., the issue of sustainable energy in the light of CST – “Prospects for sustainable development of the energy sector in the times of global climate change and environmental threats.” The security of the current and future generations can be guaranteed only if the natural, economic, and social components of the environment are balanced with the ‘technological and ethical issues’ (p. 110).

“Decent work and economic growth from the perspective of sustainable development and Catholic social teaching” is the focus of Chapter 8, relating it with the SDG 8. Though the dignity of human labour and the right to work is emphasised, the CST clarifies that work is a human vocation and the focus on monetary improvement should not lead people astray from the primary mission ‘God, another man and himself’ (p. 128).

SDG 9 is to “Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation” and Chapter 9 analyses this goal in relation to CST and advocates the gradual development instead of un-controlled development ‘freed from moral, social or political control’ (p.149).

In parallel with SDG 10, the tenth chapter of the book is on “Reducing inequality within and among countries” and discusses particularly social inclusion, social capital and protection of migrants. In the midst of the plurality of different cultures we need to consider the inequalities they bring into the economic, legal and social fields and work collaboratively to reduce the inequalities and discriminations based on differences.

“The Church vs. the issue of cultural heritage and social integration” is the focus of investigation in Chapter 11, relating CST with SDG 11, “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.” The natural, infrastructural, economic, and cultural dimensions are to be seen from social and moral perspectives assuring care for people who are most affected by unfavourable changes in their environment.

Chapter 12 is a reflexive debate on how profoundly humanity is affected by consumerism, and how the CST in harmony with the Agenda 30 helps in creating a balance between the subjective needs of a consumer and the moral responsibilities of individuals and

societies towards the planet. The modern consumption pattern based on the assumption that “the more goods or services we produce, own and use, the better” - is neither sustainable nor moral.

Chapter 13 takes a narrative style approach towards the threat of climate change as a result of human impact and the importance of the creation of organized environmental protection groups. As in the previous chapters, the authors highlight the influence of climate changes on the well-being of the poorest and the moral responsibility of those in authority to address them

Chapter 14 pertains to the consensus of CST and Agenda 30 in the admission of the existential and economic threat that pollution of seas, excessive fishing, and loss of marine life have become for the humankind, while pointing out the challenges of effective and universal law-making regarding the protection of seas.

Chapter 15 focuses on effective land management and finding feasible solutions through an ecological perspective rather than increasingly vague international statutes leaning towards bio-centric and eco-centric approaches.

Chapter 16 titled, “Conditions for the effectiveness of guarantees of the individual’s freedom in the modern state” responding to the call of SDG 16 to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provides access to justice for all, and builds effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Chapter 17 is on “The role of the Catholic Church in the building of the partnership for the implementation of SDGs.” The Catholic Church promotes dialogue and effective partnerships for peace and development for all.

In the concluding chapter, this monograph highlights the similarities between the Catholic Social Teaching and Agenda 2030, as both emphasize on the need for specific actions to solve global problems, as well as the notion that humanity essentially utilizes the same natural and social resources and the problem lies in the extent to which and how these resources are utilized. Although there are underlying differences based on prioritization of the objectives and their operationalization, the monograph concludes that the synergetic potential for the implementation of the Agenda can be a motivation for the two approaches to come together.