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**Sollicitudo Rei Socialis:
Structures of Sin: Population, and Ecology**
VITALIANO R. GOROSPE, S.J.

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, the 1967 social encyclical of Paul VI, Pope John Paul II issued in 30 December 1987 a subsequent social encyclical, "Concern for Social Matters" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, henceforth to be referred to as *Sollicitudo*). This new encyclical's social message is most timely and relevant to the present Philippine situation.

The purpose of this note is threefold: (1) to provide from a Christian Filipino perspective an overview of the social message of the new encyclical; (2) to point out its significance in updating and developing the social teaching of *Populorum Progressio*, and (3) to highlight three social concerns of *Sollicitudo* which are likewise the concerns of the Philippine Church and most pertinent to the Philippine situation, namely,—Social Sin, Population, and Ecology.

Sollicitudo is divided into five main parts: (1) The originality of *Populorum Progressio* (PP) in its moral evaluation of "development"; (2) A survey of the important changes since PP in the contemporary world; (3) The Church's teaching on authentic human development; (4) A theological reading of modern problems and (5) Some particular guidelines.

According to the *L'Observatore Romano*, (29 February 1988, p. 14), the encyclical *Sollicitudo* hinges on the notion of development as found in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. A comparison between the two social encyclicals reveals the continuity and updating of the Papal social teaching along the following lines:

1. An in-depth analysis of the *economic* and *political* situation shows two obstacles to development: first, the division between East and West and the consequent relationship between North and South,

- and secondly, the armaments race and arms trade. (n. 15; 20; 24; 10)
2. Among the positive factors to development are the increased awareness of interdependence and respect for the integrity of nature. (n. 26; 39)
 3. The relationship between development and respect for human rights, the cultural aspects especially respect for the identity of each people, ecological concern, etc. has been emphasized. (n. 8; 15; 34)
 4. The moral obstacles to development lead to a theological reading of the present problems of purely material development (superdevelopment) and underdevelopment. There is a necessary linkage between personal sin like the all consuming desire for profit and the thirst for absolute power and social sin or what the encyclical calls "structures of sin" which make radical self-transformation or conversion very difficult. (n. 28; 36)
 5. There is an essential moral aspect of development as well as a biblical and patristic basis for commitment to development. (n. 29; 35)
 6. The moral duty of solidarity between individuals and nations is the answer to problems of personal and structural or social sin.
 7. Among the reform of structures of sin that are badly needed are world monetary and financial systems, transfer of technologies, certain aspects of international organizations. (n. 43)
 8. Developing nations must strive for independence and solidarity with other nations. (n. 46)

These principles constitute the Christian meaning of human development which from the viewpoint of the Christian faith should be centered on the Eucharist—the sacrament or sign of unity—as the key to human solidarity and global unity.

STRUCTURES OF SIN

Sollicitudo's social teaching on the "structures of sin" is most significant because for the first time a Papal encyclical takes cognizance of the relatively new concept of social sin which has developed from Vatican II, emphasized by the 1971 Synod on *Justice in the World* as well as Liberation Theology in the Third World, and officially accepted by the Vatican Instructions on "Liberation Theology" (1984) and "Christian Freedom and Liberation" (1986). The encyclical now calls social sin "structures of sin."

There is no need to trace again the evolution of "structures of sin" from "social sin" which Peter J. Henriott (*Catholic Mind* [Oct. 1973]:38-53) has already done remarkably well. Based on Church teaching and human experience, Henriott defines social sin as: 1) a structure that systematically oppresses human dignity and violates human rights, e.g., martial law under Marcos; 2) a situation that promotes and facilitates individual selfishness and imposes gross inequality, e.g., feudalistic land ownership or institutionalized graft and corruption; 3) the complicity or silent acquiescence in social injustice, e.g., the government-controlled media suppressing or distorting the truth or the military conspiracy in the assassination of Ninoy Aquino.

In the 1986 Vatican Instruction on "Christian Freedom and Liberation," there is a deliberate qualification that remains questionable in the light, not only of contemporary experience but also of the latest encyclical's approved theological term—"structures of sin." For the sin which is at the root of unjust situations is, in a true and immediate sense, a voluntary act which has its source in the freedom of individuals. Only in a derived and secondary sense is it applicable to structures, and only in this sense can one speak of social sin (n. 75).

Traditional moral theology held that structures do not sin; persons do. From a layman's point of view, Philippine society does not commit injustice. Individuals or groups of individuals do. And yet in many ways structures, situations, systems, institutions can facilitate or even induce the commission of individual sins of injustice. The deteriorating peace and order situation does not commit murder, but it makes multiple murder easier. The vice syndicates in Ermita do not commit prostitution but they turn our women into prostitutes. The feudal structure of land ownership does not commit social injustice but it induces and leads landowners to be exploitative and tillers to be irresponsible or violent.

What does the encyclical *Sollicitudo* have to say about sinful and unjust structures? The formula "structures of sin" is used at least eight times in the encyclical. In the survey of the contemporary world, *Sollicitudo* mentions economic, financial, and social mechanisms manipulated by people that widen the gap between the rich and poor (n. 16). As a theological category, and not the object of a sociopolitical analysis, "structures of sin," though rooted in personal sin "become the source of other sins, and so influence people's behavior" (n. 36). Two attitudes—on the one hand, "the all consuming desire for profit," and on the other, "the thirst for power, with the intention of imposing one's will upon others" (n. 37) create two forms of imperialism, liberal capitalism and

Marxist collectivism. These "structures of sin" are "radically opposed to peace and development," or, in the words of Paul VI, peace. They constitute the obstacle to authentic liberation (n. 46). *Sollicitudo* concludes that "evil mechanisms" and "structures of sin" can be overcome only through the exercise of human and Christian solidarity, which is a key concept in the social thought of Pope John Paul II.

If there is one social issue which will make or unmake the Philippines and which Communist ideology will exploit to overthrow the freedom and democracy restored by President Corazon Aquino, it is the centuries-old and seemingly insoluble land reform issue. Almost all the Philippine presidents have attempted or promised some form of land reform, but all in vain. What remains of the old feudalism and colonialism is still the gross economic and social inequality due to a feudal land ownership structure. The main unjust "structure of sin" in Philippine society is land ownership monopolized by the few to the detriment of the landless and powerless majority.

The main obstacles to a genuine land reform come either from the landowners or from the landless tenants or tillers. The Institute of Church and Social Issues (ICSI), in its newspaper column (*The Manila Chronicle*, 25 May 1988, p. 4), exposed the ignorance of landlords with regard to the evolution of the social teaching of the Church. These landowners called the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) "an instrument of fallacious social justice." Why? Because they accuse the Philippine Catholic Bishops of "proselytizing a politically motivated and ill conceived agrarian reform program" that "runs counter to certain fundamental concepts of social justice and equality upheld by no less than the highest ecclesiastical authorities of the Catholic Church." These landlords quote out of context Leo XIII (1891) and Pius XI (1931) and ignore the development of the Church's doctrine on the social dimension of private ownership which Pope John Paul II stressed in his Bacolod speech to the hacienda owners. On the part of the land-recipients, past history has shown that without the long process of education towards responsible stewardship, the land shared is time and again resold to other land speculators and landlords. Thus the feudalistic structure of land ownership is perpetuated through a vicious cycle.

The 14 July 1987 pastoral exhortation of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) ("Thirsting for Justice") is addressed to agricultural "structures of sin." The CBCP's brief exhortation is divided into four parts: poverty and the challenge of faith, sharing in justice, an option for the poor and comprehensive agrarian reform, and

the pain and joy of sharing in the Paschal Mystery. At the outset, the bishops outline the critical national problem which demands radical agrarian reform in the words of Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*, n. 29:

Excessive economic and social disparity between individuals and peoples of the one human race is a source of scandal and militates against social justice, equity, human dignity, as well as social peace.

In a country where 70 percent of the people live below the poverty line, there would be no need of an executive order or congressional legislation if we took the perspective and challenge of Christian faith whose essence is *sharing*. Faith demands a preferential (but not exclusive) option for the poor and solidarity with the poor. There is no solution to the many problems connected with agrarian reform except sharing after the example of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. "The heart of the Eucharist is sharing."

The Bishops stand for a comprehensive program of agrarian reform so that the 70 percent who live below the poverty line may "have more to be more," and for a program which is realistic, that is, within the capabilities of the government to manage and finance. On 23 May 1988 President Aquino assured Congress that the government can provide the ₱10 billion to implement CARP for the first two years.

Twelve national peasants' organizations, with a combined membership of 1.5 million farmers, fishermen, agricultural workers and rural women, formed the 18-21 April 1988 Congress for a People's Agrarian Reform (CPAR) to bring to the consciousness of as many people as possible the urgent need for a genuine agrarian reform. The principles of CPAR's agrarian reform agenda include: land to the tiller, owner cultivatorship and abolition of absentee landownership; full coverage of all agricultural lands and all types of direct producers; landowner compensation based on farm size, mode of acquisition and other relevant factors; previous land rental and uncompensated labor by beneficiaries counted as advance payments for the land; popular participation in policy making and implementation; preferential option for cooperatives and collective farms; upholding the rights of rural women to land ownership; reversion of TNC (Transnational Corporation)-held lands and their operations to Filipino control; greater access of small fisherfolk to water resources; respect for the land rights of indigenous communities; and the application of fair and just labor standards for agricultural workers.

Those who do not believe that Congress will provide the necessary CARP legislation offer the alternative of violent revolution or Communism. As Bishop Francisco Claver, S.J. said: "If this land problem is not solved, it will only make Communism more attractive. Now are they going to wait until the communists come and force them to divest themselves of their land?" In their January 1988 joint statement, the Columban Fathers say that "without genuine land reform, the present insurgency will develop into a long and destructive civil war."

One disappointing note in the CBCP pastoral exhortation and in the statements of the 29 Bishops on Agrarian Reform (*CBCP Monitor* 9 [January-February 1988]:43-47), is the Church's own example and contribution towards solving the problem of land. Instead of taking the initiative of voluntary sharing of Church lands, the CBCP states that "on our part, we will not seek exemptions to whatever may be legislated towards a comprehensive agrarian reform." Although there are no more vast friar lands, all twenty-nine bishops were 100 percent in favor of land reform, but there was not a single bishop who proposed any Church lands to be voluntarily shared.

THE POPULATION PROBLEM

Sollicitudo points out that whereas in the South, the demographic problem creates difficulties for development, in the North the cause for concern is both the zero growth and aging populations. The encyclical finds fault with "governments in many countries launching systematic campaigns against birth, contrary not only to the cultural and religious identity of the countries themselves but also contrary to the nature of true development." Financial aid from abroad is given only on condition that the government implements a population control policy and program. "In any event, there is an absolute lack of respect for the freedom of the choice of the parties involved. Men and women are often subjected to intolerable pressures, including economic ones, in order to force them to submit to this new form of oppression." (n.25).

In applying the encyclical's warning to the Philippine Church, Cardinal Sin issued a pastoral letter on the twentieth anniversary of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* which banned artificial birth control. In this letter the Cardinal criticizes the Philippine population policy and program in the form of five questions: (1) why zero population growth by the year 2000 (NEDA Medium Term Plan)? (2) why join the worldwide drive for sterilization after two children? (3) why subject women to experimentation with contraceptive injectibles (Depo Provera)? (4) why grant

maternity leave and tax exemptions benefits only to parents with two children? (5) why accept grants conditioned by a government-planned population control program?

The encyclical *Sollicitudo* calls attention to the "intolerable pressures" which couples undergo. Since natural family planning (NFP) requires continuing education and proper motivation, the poor often have no alternative but artificial contraceptives given free by the government. Those who receive any family planning counseling usually do what government doctors or counselors advise them to do to limit the number of children. The great majority of Filipino couples think that since they neither have the time nor the money, it is impractical to adopt NFP. It is difficult to see how much it can be said that they can really make a free decision in the choice of the means of birth control. Although family planning is a government service for couples who really cannot decide between natural and artificial family planning, the present system or structures may, as the encyclical points out, subject individuals to "intolerable pressures."

What can be said about the government's population policy vis-a-vis the Church's social teaching? On the one hand, it is an oversimplification to claim that overpopulation is the cause of poverty in this country. On the other hand, it is also false to say that overpopulation is not an obstacle to development. The ICSI published (*Manila Chronicle*, 16 April 1988) a sane view of population policy consonant with the teaching of Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* and John Paul II in *Sollicitudo*. Although the 1973 constitutional mandate for the State to limit population levels conducive to the national welfare was deleted by the 1986 Constitutional Convention, in the face of massive poverty, according to ICSI "a major effort should be made by government to demonstrate its political will in attacking other obstacles to development, including the landlords, before entering more vigorously into the very private area of reproductive behaviour among the poor."

The Philippine population grows at the rate of 2.4 percent which means an additional 1.4 million people every year. The serious implications of this growth rate on food, employment, wages, housing, education, environment, etc. have been discussed at a *kapihan* (*Manila Bulletin*, 17 May 1988, pp. 1, 12), and concerned government officials like Senator Leticia Ramos-Shahani of the Senate's Subcommittee on Population, Labor Secretary Frank Drillon, Dr. Carmen Garcia, Executive Secretary of Popcom, Dr. Corazon Raymundo, Director of the UP Population Institute, and Department of Environment and Natural Re-

sources (DENR) Undersecretary Celso R. Roque, would like the government to reconsider its dormant population control policy.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Perhaps a "historic first" in the Church's social teaching is the Christian doctrine on ecology as presented in *Sollicitudo*. The encyclical gives and explains three main reasons why man should respect the environment and natural resources. The natural cosmos must not be used "simply as one wishes, according to one's own economic needs." "Natural resources are limited" and some are not renewable. And the "direct or indirect result of industrialization is, ever more frequently, the pollution of the environment, with serious consequences for the health of the population." In short, the Church affirms that "a true concept of development cannot ignore the use of the elements of nature, the renewability of resources and the consequences of haphazard industrialization—three main considerations which alert our consciences to the moral dimensions of development" (n. 34).

Similarly, and in the face of serious and urgent national problems, the CBCP on 29 January issued a "first" and timely pastoral letter—"What is Happening to our Beautiful Land?"—on ecology and the grave environmental problems in the Philippines. First of all, the bishops present the facts to show the alarming and rapidly deteriorating ecological situation of the country. The editorials of most of the major dailies had nothing but praise and support for the timely warning of the bishops against the continuing rape of our forests and seas, the unabated soil erosion of our mountains and shores, the destruction of watersheds, the drying up of rivers and their pollution with harmful chemicals. The CBCP is prophetic in considering the ecological issue—the wanton exploitation of our land and waters—as the "roots of many of our economic and political problems" and a "more deep seated crisis" than "political instability, economic decline and a growth in armed conflict" (Introduction).

Secondly, the bishops ground the Christian vision of ecology on the Christian doctrine of creation and the kingship of Christ over all creation. It is interesting to note that the DENR's open letter below recognizes the bishops' teaching on the place of Christ as center of the biosphere. Thirdly, the bishops conclude their letter by directing their warning to the individual, to the Church, and to the government. They point out the responsibility of each of the three Filipino sectors for the stewardship of our land and natural resources.

Both Secretary Fulgencio S. Factoran, Jr. and Undersecretary Celso

R. Roque of the DENR wrote an open letter of commendation (*The Philippine Star*, 18 May 1988, p. 5), to the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) for writing a long overdue pastoral letter on the environment. The DENR open letter acknowledges that environmental activism is a moral imperative and commitment. In an earlier paper DENR Undersecretary Roque pointed out separate but interacting factors that determine the quality of the environment (*The Manila Chronicle*, 7 May 1988). These are stresses caused by the nature of our ecological environment, population growth, the effects of agriculture, forestry, mining, and manufacturing, the necessary knowledge for the management of ecosystems; and actual protective measures. The DENR 18 May letter seeks the answer to the ecological crisis in a national consensus on ultimate human values. For this there is need of faith, reason, and pragmatism. According to the DENR the CBCP statement on ecology is an important contribution in this direction.

Undersecretary Roque (*The Manila Chronicle*, 7 May 1988) explained three environmental crises which the Philippines faces: the *ecological* crisis, the *knowledge* crisis, and the *bioethical* crisis. In the *ecological* crisis, forest depletion and soil erosion are shocking and irreversible. Every year we lose about two hundred hectares of top soil one meter thick. In twenty-five years we will have lost 25 billion cubic meters of top soil. The Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) of DENR (*Malaya*, 17 May 1988, p. 7) reports the extent of soil erosion as follows: 50 percent of twenty-two provinces are badly eroded, e.g., Batangas and Cebu (80-85 percent); Marinduque (75-80 percent); Ilocos Sur and La Union (60-70 percent). Before World War II, 78 percent of our land was forested; after World War II only 38 percent; at present only 34 percent. The fact that only one guards 4,000 hectares of forest is a useless and futile protective measure. The CBCP letter points out that "out of the original 30 million hectares there is (sic) now only 1 million hectares of primary forest left." With regard to the *knowledge* crisis, Roque held up the example of scientists who still dispute the role of salt water in Laguna de Bay's primary production. There is no scientifically accepted way of determining the impact of Napindan Hydraulic Control Structure on lake fisheries. There is also a lack of reliable data on air pollution levels in Manila. The *bioethical* crisis is the need to develop moral norms and guidelines on human responsibility and an ethical attitude toward life forms. This is where the Pro-Life movement in the Philippines and the development of a Filipino theology of creation mentioned in the CBCP letter can make a distinct contribution towards Filipino ecology-consciousness.