

International Congress for the 50th anniversary of the Encyclical Letter Mater et Magistra

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Thank you for allowing me the privilege of speaking to you about a task many of us wrestle with:

Translating the principles of Catholic Social Teaching into the mission and the daily activities of Catholic institutions, both large and small.

Over the nearly two decades I've led Catholic Relief Services, I've had the opportunity to speak to many Catholic audiences, from the parish level to large gatherings like university commencements and Catholic congresses and conventions. And in nearly every speech, I spend a significant amount of time talking about Catholic Social Teaching, which I've heard referred to as "a jewel" of our faith tradition. These principles have nourished CRS over the years, and have helped us to focus and deepen our mission as a humanitarian agency that is first and foremost Catholic. But as Blessed Pope John XXIII stated in *Mater et Magistra*, turning principles into practical applications for management and programming is hard work: He says,

The transition from theory to practice is of its very nature difficult; and it is especially so when one tries to reduce to concrete terms a social doctrine such as that of the Church. (Mater et Magistra, 229)

Yes, it's hard work. And it's work that's never done. We must wrestle each day with the task before us, acting as the Body of Christ in the world, with Catholic Social Teaching guiding us. And occasionally, we have to step back and take a more profound look at who we are, where we are, where we want to go, and how Catholic Social Teaching can help us get there.

I'd like to take a few minutes to first talk about how we apply Catholic Social Teaching within Catholic Relief Services, and then to look at some examples of how this social doctrine helps to form our mission.

For those of you not familiar with the size and scope of Catholic Relief Services, let me give a bit of background. We are one of the larger members of the Caritas Internationalis confederation, with about 5,000 employees who support programming in nearly 100 countries around the world. With a staff that large, and because we work in so many countries where the Church is a minority, many of our employees are not Catholic. Yet they are dedicated to our mission and the principles we espouse as a Catholic agency; they want to work for us, as opposed to another aid agency, and many have done outstanding work over a period of many years.

Still, this presents us with a great challenge: how do we instill the values of Catholic Social Teaching to such a diverse staff? Let me tell you just a few steps we've taken.

- **The Justice Lens.** In the wake of violence that led to ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and genocide in Rwanda, we realized that we needed a clearer sense of what our Mission and Ministry was about and what was missing in our approaches. We went back to the sources of the Church's social doctrine and resolved that justice-- the establishment and maintenance of right relationships among all people—should become the basis of our mission. It was clear to us that works of mercy and achievements in development would continue to be undermined through violence and inequality if CRS did not address the root causes of poverty and marginalization. From this point, we began consciously employing a "Justice Lens" in creating, implementing and evaluating our programming. Namely, we viewed our mission and work from the

perspective of whether it built a culture of justice and peace through the promotion of just and right relationships in the societies where we worked.

- **The CRS Guiding Principles.** One document every CRS employee is familiar with is our *Guiding Principles*, which were developed around the same time as the Justice Lens. The Guiding Principles are a series of 8 statements that summarize the essence of Catholic Social Teaching, including the sacredness of life, rights and responsibilities, the social nature of humanity, the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, the option for the poor and stewardship of creation. You'll find a framed copy of these Guiding Principles on the wall of our CRS offices, translated into the local language. We refer to them constantly as we carry out our daily work.
- **The Solidarity and Justice Reflection.** Among the challenges we face are the staff turnover that occurs in any institution over time and the varying levels of familiarity with Catholic teaching that new staff bring with them, both Catholic and non-Catholic. To address this issue, CRS has devised a Justice and Solidarity Reflection, which is a requirement for each new employee. This reflection is a two-day intensive immersion in the principles of Catholic Social Thought, the history of how CRS came to a renewed appreciation of it, and an overview of how CRS employs Catholic Social Thinking in our programming and in the workplace.
- **Lectures on Catholic Topics.** The CRS staff is highly trained, intellectually curious and work hard to keep themselves informed on the latest developments in their field. We thought we should take that same rigor to our knowledge of the Church's teaching particularly on social doctrine. So we have invited some of the preeminent thinkers to speak with our staff on a variety of topics, many of them focused on Pope Benedict XVI's magnificent encyclicals. Our list of speakers include George Weigel, the biographer of Blessed Pope John Paul II; John Allen Jr., the well-known American Vaticanologist; Dr. Michael Naughton, Professor of Theology at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota; Dr. Scott Appleby, Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame; and Fr. J. Bryan Hehir, who was formerly my counselor at CRS and now directs health and social services for the Archdiocese of Boston as well as holds a Chair at Harvard University in the Practice of Religion and Public Life.

Now I'd like to give you some examples of how CRS embodies Catholic Social Teaching in carrying out our mission.

As an international humanitarian organization, CRS can contribute significantly to Catholics' understanding of international social justice issues because of our experience on the ground in 100 countries. CRS came to recognize that we had not only an opportunity, but also an obligation, to help US Catholics respond to the Gospel call to love our most vulnerable brothers and sisters around the world and to respond to their needs with Christian charity.

Consequently, CRS has begun a major push to engage Catholics in the United States, on the basis of our shared faith, in actions that promote global love of neighbor and build upon our understanding that we are all part of One Human Family. CRS is raising awareness that the Catholic faith calls each of the faithful, particularly the laity, to realize that assaulting any person's dignity through poverty, conflict or injustice is an assault against our own humanity. For, as Blessed Pope John says in *Mater et Magistra*, regarding the translation of Catholic Social Teaching into action:

It is a task which belongs particularly to our sons, the laity, for it is their lot to live an active life in the world and organize themselves for the attainment of temporal ends. (Mater et Magistra, 240)

To that end, CRS created a U.S. Operations division in our headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland, to expand our work in the United States. Through education, advocacy, global exchanges and other programs, our U.S. Operations Division helps Catholics in the United States understand that all aspects of their lives – the way they live, consume, vote, invest and give – affect the One Human Family both at home and abroad.

A recent example of this approach occurred in connection with the recent referendum in Sudan. CRS personnel on the ground in southern Sudan expressed grave concerns about the possibility for violence as the date approached for a January 2011 referendum that would determine the south would secede from northern Sudan and form an independent nation. CRS, working with the Sudanese bishops, launched a number of peacebuilding activities in the run-up to the election, including hosting trainings to teach peacebuilding skills to the justice and peace staffs in the eight Sudanese dioceses. We also sponsored a radio campaign that shared peace messages across the country in 11 languages through the Sudan Catholic Radio Network and Sudan Radio Services.

In the United States, CRS, in full partnership with the Catholic Church of Sudan and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, mobilized the Catholic community through the *Peace in Sudan* campaign. This effort urged Catholics in the U.S. to pray in solidarity with the Sudan bishops' 101 Days of Prayer in support of full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for Sudan.

Leading up to the referendum, CRS and the USCCB called on the U.S. Administration to significantly strengthen and focus its engagement to ensure that the referendum would be conducted fairly and peacefully. At the same time, CRS and USCCB mobilized our U.S.-based advocacy network, through the *Catholics Confront Global Poverty* initiative, to call, write and visit their members of Congress and the Administration to promote peace in Sudan. To bolster these efforts, CRS identified and trained a network of more than 150 student leaders in colleges and universities around the United States, known as CRS Sudan Ambassadors, to raise awareness of and promote peace in Sudan. Some of the Ambassadors also met with high-ranking officials in the Obama Administration to urge them to stay engaged in the referendum process.

Finally, CRS, together with the USCCB, also sponsored two delegations of Sudanese bishops to the United States, where they met with a variety of delegations at the United Nations in New York, visited members of Congress and U.S. government officials in Washington D.C., and spoke before several Catholic groups.

Of course, it is the people of Sudan who can and should take credit for a remarkable transition in southern Sudan that for the most part has been peaceful. But we can be gratified that we played our small part.

Let me conclude by saying that we, the people of CRS, have learned from our long experience that technical expertise and consummate professionalism are not enough, especially for any organization that calls itself Catholic. As Blessed Pope John said,

Let men make all the technical and economic progress they can, there will be no peace nor justice in the world until they return to a sense of their dignity as creatures and sons of God, who is the first and final cause of all created being. Separated from God a man is but a monster, in himself and toward others; for the right ordering of human society presupposes the right ordering of man's conscience with God, who is Himself the source of all justice, truth and love. (Mater et Magistra, 215)

Pope Benedict echoed this thought in *Deus Caritas Est*, when he wrote:

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. (Deus Caritas Est, 32)

The tension between technical competence and heartfelt concern is not a problem to be solved. Rather, it is a tension to be managed. It is a “both/and.” We can, and must do both. Living out the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in the world, working among the poorest of the poor, is a tangible sign of Christian witness and evangelization. The people we serve may not describe it as such in so many words, but we do see they are touched by Christ’s love.

Not too long ago, one of our partners from the Hararghe Catholic Secretariat was visiting the site of a borehole in a village near Dire Dawa in eastern Ethiopia, where the population is primarily Muslim. The borehole, which had been dug using a rig donated by CRS, now provides 2,400 households with access to clean water. These are families that previously had to trudge hours to fetch clean water. This daily chore kept children out of school and made the lives of the village’s women much more difficult.

Our partner saw a woman filling a 5-gallon jug with water from one of the system’s taps and asked her what she thought of the water project.

“It’s wonderful!” she exclaimed. “Look how clean this water is. Our life has changed.”

“Do you know who is responsible for this project?” our partner inquired. The woman put down her water jug and looked at him with a puzzled expression.

“They call themselves *Catholics*,” she said, emphasizing the word at the end of her sentence. “I’m not sure exactly what that means, but we give thanks to God for their work.”

Thank you for this opportunity to share the work of my colleagues at CRS.