

## **Reflections on Development and Peace and its Struggle for Justice in the World**

In response to concerns from members and others around the mission of Development and Peace in light of on-going criticisms from LifeSiteNews and its readers, I have been asked to write a few thoughts on my understanding of how Development and Peace, as a Catholic International Development agency, partners with others in the struggle for social justice.

It's important to note that I do this as someone who has no direct experience with the international programming of Development and Peace. I have, however, been active in D&P activities for over ten years for the Diocese of Saskatoon, with the STM Just Youth Group, and also with the National Education Committee of Development and Peace, responsible for its education program in Canada.

### **The Substance of the Critique**

The criticisms of Development and Peace over the World March for Women and the contemporary attacks over its alleged support for abortion related activities – both originating from LifeSiteNews (2000, 2009) - have many similarities. In essence, and at its best, I think the critique can best be summarized by this fundamental question: How can a Catholic agency partner with another non-Catholic organization in the pursuit of a common goal when that non-Catholic partner holds differing beliefs and even acts contrary to Catholic understandings?

In the case of the World March for Women in 2000, the critique was framed like this: how can Development and Peace, the Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops (CCCCB), the Catholic Women's League of Canada (CWL) and the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) support the World March for Women (a coalition of organizations seeking to end violence against and poverty for women and children) when other participants in that action support such things as fully accessible abortion services, or an end to the discrimination against lesbians?

The Catholic Church, and Development and Peace, clearly oppose abortion as it offends/destroys the dignity of the human person, understood as operative from the beginning of human life to its natural end. The Catholic Church also recognizes the dignity of lesbian women, although it disagrees with others on how this dignity is realized. Discrimination against lesbians, per se, however, is clearly against Catholic doctrine.

So how did these Canadian Catholic institutions articulate their reasons for partnering with other organizations in the World March for Women? This is what the CCCC, the CWL, D&P and the CRC said in a joint letter: "As Catholic groups, we engage in the March in a spirit of respect for women around the world, acknowledging our differences and finding the common ground on which to build change" (CCCCB, 2000). They stated, "We wish to underline that support of the

general objectives of the World March of Women 2000 does not mean support for each and every one of the specific Canadian demands.” In other words, even though these four Catholic organizations could not agree with each and every demand (such as abortion), arising from a diverse group of organizations, they chose to cooperate on those areas of common concern. As the Catholic organizations put it, they cooperated, “to cancel Third World debt; to end loan conditions that force countries to cut education, health and basic services; to end sweatshop conditions in free trade zones; to ensure food security for countries; to end all trafficking in women and girls; to prosecute those using rape as a weapon of war.” Recognizing the significance of the World March for Women, involving 4,190 groups from 153 countries, the Catholic organizations refused to be excluded from participating in what they understood as a critical moment for the pursuit of social justice. They wrote:

“We believe that Canadian Catholics should not allow themselves to be shut out of the March of Women because some groups decide to press for demands that are clearly unacceptable to us... The March of Women 2000 is a powerful bridge of solidarity to our sisters - across hemispheres, languages, faiths and experiences. They seek justice. We are there with them” (CCCB, 2000).

The operating principle for partnering here is to honestly acknowledge differences, and to work collaboratively where possible in a justice seeking solidarity.

More recently, the focus of the critique was “that financial assistance by Development and Peace aided projects related to the promotion of abortion” in Mexico (CCCB, 2009). A United Nations document denouncing the deteriorating human rights context in Mexico was signed by many Mexican organizations, including five partners financially supported by Development and Peace. Of the 50 or so organizations that signed the document, some also had expressed in it their support for abortion services. The scope of the human rights abuses went well beyond the question of abortion (kidnappings and execution of journalists, for example), and so Development and Peace’s Mexican partners (whose own expertise and advocacy concerned wider socio-political and economic processes of exclusion), as well as the Dominican and Jesuit orders, had signed the document expressing their desire to be a part of a movement to assist in addressing human rights abuses. The critique from LifeSiteNews was that by signing this document, Development and Peace (not the Dominicans and Jesuits?) was funding the promotion of abortion.

A “Committee of Inquiry” of the CCCB, with help from the both US and Mexican Catholic Bishops found this to be untrue:

In its report on five Mexican Non-Governmental Organizations that had received project funding from Development and Peace, the Committee of Inquiry of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) has

come to the conclusion the allegations are unfounded... (CCCB, 2009)

The Committee's report tried to recognize the honest motivations for the Development and Peace partners, but also suggested that by signing a document that "endorsed several orientations" conflicting with Catholic doctrine, the D&P partners (not the Dominicans and Jesuits?) had acted "imprudently."

We recognize that the five Mexican organizations assisted by Development and Peace were imprudent in signing the "Report on Civil Society Organizations for Universal Periodic Review". At the same time, we understand how, working in difficult circumstances, the intention was to be in solidarity with the more than 50 other groups working for human rights in Mexico, including religious orders such as the Dominicans and Jesuits. Unfortunately, however, the Report they endorsed contains several orientations not in accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church. (CCCB, 2009)

Perhaps because of the persistent and vociferous nature of the LifeSiteNews campaign against Development and Peace, the CCCB was on this occasion, when compared to the World March for Women response, more muted in its support for the D&P partners' collaboration with other actors in support of human rights. One way to interpret the CCCB statement is that it defends the principle of working in solidarity on common projects with those with whom we differ, but that this decision remains a contingent one, depending upon particular circumstances, requiring "prudent" judgment.

### **Catholic Theological Principles for Collaborating for Social Justice**

In light of the messy and complicated circumstances surrounding international development processes, I want to highlight from the Catholic Tradition some important principles to guide the partnering with "others" in pursuit of social justice aims.

### **Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: Partnering for Global Justice**

Development and Peace was founded in 1967, the same year as the pre-cursor to the contemporary Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Inspired by *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World), The Second Vatican Council generally, and the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples), both Development and Peace and the Justice and Peace commission of the Vatican sought to foster progress throughout the world in addressing the root causes of poverty and oppression. The objectives of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (articulated in 1988) include "promoting justice and peace in the world, in light of the Gospel and of the social teaching of the Church" (PCJP, 2010). It's clear from its mandate that it seeks to work in dialogue with institutions within the Church, within academia, and with an

ecumenical spirit, particularly with the World Council of Churches. It also seeks to work in dialogue with secular institutions and movements for social justice.

Finally, mention must be made of various links with **secular organizations** working for the promotion of justice, peace and the respect for human dignity. Over the years, relations with international organizations have increased considerably. Because of the interest of the Holy See in the work of the United Nations, the Pontifical Council, in collaboration with the Secretariat of State, has frequent contacts with the United Nations and its specialized agencies, especially at the time of the major international conferences that deal with such questions as development, population, environment, international trade, or human rights. Equal importance is given to regional organizations, among which the Council of Europe and the European Union. The Pontifical Council also welcomes exchanges with non-governmental organizations that share its aims and are working in the field of peace, justice and human rights (PCJP, website, 2010). *Original Emphasis.*

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace recognizes that it cannot act alone in the search for social justice. It must engage peoples, organizations and movements that inhabit a multitude of cultures, thought forms and practices that are not indigenous to Catholicism. What are the criteria for the collaboration? The Pontifical Council notes that it “will foster relations with international Catholic organizations and with other bodies, be they Catholic or not, that are sincerely committed to the promotion of the values of justice and peace in the world.” (Ibid.) In other words, the principle for collaboration is not identification with Catholic doctrine, but sincere commitment to justice and peace. This is a critical distinction, and certainly one not appreciated by many of Development and Peace’s critics.

Echoing the call of *The Church in the Modern World* (GS, 1-3) for the Church to act in solidarity with the world’s grief, anguish and poverty, we find here a fundamental sympathy with those struggling for a more just world. When the Church dialogues with those with whom it differs in the common pursuit of justice, it stands alongside humanity as sister and brother, and not as judge.

### **Nostra Aetate: A Commitment to Seeing the Good**

Although not immediately apparent as a source for understanding principles for cooperation in international development, the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) also provides some sage advice.

While maintaining the universally salvific significance of Christ as “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6), the Church urges its members as they engage other religious peoples in dialogue that they “recognize, preserve and promote

the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these [peoples]" (NA, para 2).

When the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, or the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, seeks to work in solidarity with those groups with whom it differs in the work of justice, it begins with a sincere attempt to discover what is true and good in these partners' work.

### **The Principle of Cooperation**

Contemporary Catholic institutions, whether in education, health care, or international development, to name but a few, enact their apostolates in a complex, pluralistic world. Collaboration and dialogue with other groups, both religious and secular, are critical to the effectiveness of these missions. Would St. Thomas More College and St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon, or Development and Peace, be able to pursue their missions without government funding, from provincial and/or federal sources? Certainly their missions would be radically diminished in scope. Without CIDA funding Development and Peace would certainly have to withdraw from development projects and partnerships all over the Global South. So this cooperation with governments necessarily involves constant dialogue and negotiation. Bold assertions of Catholic belief alone will not justify or secure public funding – a public discourse is necessary, articulating how these Catholic institutions serve a greater common good that goes beyond the Catholic world.

So what are, morally speaking, the parameters for justifiably working together as partners in a common cause? The Catholic tradition has engaged this difficult question through the use of the principle of legitimate cooperation. I would like to direct the reader to two condensed and pastoral explanations of the principle of legitimate cooperation: the Health Care Ethics Guide (2000) published by the Catholic Health Association of Canada, a guide approved by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Indiana based University of Notre Dame's "Principles for Institutional Charitable Activity" policy, found on its President's website (2010). The Health Care Ethics guide will obviously, for Canadian Catholics, be a more authoritative source, yet the Notre Dame policy is helpful because it arose in response to issues surrounding charitable giving specifically.

To begin with, the Health Care Ethics Guide (CHAC, 2000) notes that: "The principle of legitimate cooperation in the Catholic moral tradition acknowledges that, in some instances, the good that is sought can be achieved only through cooperation with what we find morally unacceptable" (p. 89). The key distinctions in this theory are between formal and material cooperation, and immediate and mediate cooperation. The University of Notre Dame (2010) puts it like this:

The Principle of Cooperation holds that it is always morally wrong to intend or approve of evil. Such illicit cooperation is called Formal

Cooperation. Occasions may, however, arise when one does not intend an evil act or practice but is in some way involved in it. This is called Material Cooperation. There are two types of material cooperation: Immediate Material Cooperation and Mediate Material Cooperation. Immediate Material Cooperation arises when the cooperating party performs the same illicit act as the wrongdoer, as, for example, a condition of their partnership. Immediate Material Cooperation in an intrinsically evil act is illicit though less culpable under circumstances of unusual duress.

Just to clarify here, an example of immediate material cooperation might be a nurse assisting in a direct abortion. In this case, s/he would be as involved in the procedure as the physician doing the operation. The nurse's activity in this case is wrong, morally speaking. However, if the surgeon's decision to undertake an illicit procedure during an operation leaves the nurse with little choice but to stay and attend at the event because of the risk of his or her departure upon the life of the patient, then the nurse could be considered to be acting under "unusual duress." In this instance, the moral tradition would say that although the nurse's cooperative act was still illicit, it was not wrong (the example comes from the Health Ethics Guide, 2000). Other circumstances of "unusual duress" may be external pressure, or extreme financial harm (CHAC, 2000).

The Notre Dame (2010) explanation continues:

Mediate Material Cooperation is permitted in two kinds of cases. In the first case, it is possible clearly to distinguish the action or contribution of an individual or institution from the activities that are contrary to fundamental Catholic moral principles. In the second case, an action or contribution violates those principles, but there is a sufficiently serious reason for such cooperation. Sufficiently serious reasons include both (1) pursuing a good that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to attain and (2) the likelihood of performing a prophetic or educational role that contains or ends wrongdoing.

So let's get concrete for a moment. Think back to the case of the Mexican partners of Development and Peace signing a UN document that also happens to be signed by groups supporting access to abortion. Obviously, Development and Peace did not fund these groups for abortion activity or promotion (so say the Bishops), so there is no argument for "formal cooperation" in evil. Is there "material cooperation" in evil? In this instance, it's hard to make the case as well that the Dominicans, Jesuits and Development and Peace partners are implicated in an evil simply by having their names appear on a document alongside other groups. Or, as the Notre Dame explanation suggests, it seems clearly possible to distinguish between the acts of Development and Peace's partners in Mexico in signing the document in support of human rights from the Catholic Church's opposition to abortion. The Development and Peace partners,

in fact, when questioned by the America wide “Committee of Inquiry” denied any attempt through their signings to make such a claim on abortion (CCCB, 2009).

Yet for the sake of argument, let’s say that, yes, Development and Peace is somehow caught up in a mediate material cooperation in an evil (that is, D&P is inadvertently caught up in their Mexican partner’s non-intentional act to promote abortion). Then such cooperation in this wrongdoing could be justifiable if either a) the struggle for human rights in Mexico would be more difficult or impossible without D&P’s partners support, and or b) that this cooperation could be regarded as educational or prophetic in bringing some sort of diminishment or even end to the human rights abuses in Mexico. That is, there would be a concrete good arising from such cooperation. For both the World March of Women and the UN declaration on Human Rights in Mexico, I’m convinced that D&P would say that these historic opportunities to align the Catholic Church with the poor and for the purposes of achieving positive social change far outweigh any negative and unintended (and marginal) complicity in the material cooperation the act of promoting abortion.

The Health Ethics Guidelines (2000) also adds two cautionary points here to be heeded in legitimate cooperation. First, “As the gravity of the matter increases, the degree of distance between the cooperative action and the wrongdoing must increase” (p. 91). The question of abortion could certainly be called a grave matter (although it is not the only one, to be sure), so it is appropriate to seek a clear distance between the actions of Development and Peace’s partners and the desire of other organizations to advocate for abortion. What adds to the distance, it seems, is that fact that it is not Development and Peace that signed the human rights declaration, but some of its physically remote partners, non-Catholic organizations, which would not be reasonably seen by any within Mexico as embodying or representing Catholic doctrine.

This reasoning naturally leads to the second point added by Health Ethics Guidelines (2000) that the possibility of scandal, or, “creating confusion between Catholic moral teaching and involvement in questionable procedures” should be eliminated (p. 91). Yet, the CHAC guidelines also leave open the possibility that “a prophetic stance in a community may seem to cause scandal to some, but this may be necessary for a greater good” (p. 91). If it has appeared scandalous to LifeSiteNews that Development and Peace has funded partners in Mexico, who in turn and of their own volition decided to support a statement advocating for human rights in Mexico alongside some other organizations who added their desire for the provision of abortion services, then that scandal might indeed be regarded by Development and Peace as necessary for the greater good of confronting the culture of human rights abuse in Mexico.

In fact Development and Peace activists might also consider the sin of “omission” as well, or the sin of failing to cooperate with a movement for social justice. Might not the Development and Peace cause the Church scandal and tarnish its

reputation for very publically refusing to support its (non-Catholic) partners in an historic opportunity for achieving social justice?

Hypothetically speaking, however, one can imagine a case where a Catholic institution funds projects in the Global South via a health care organization that, among a whole host of otherwise morally sound and worthwhile projects, also provides access to abortion. In this instance, what sort of cooperation would be involved?

It is necessary here to also understand that the legal contracts that define the partnerships between Catholic institutions and non-Catholic institutions are usually very specific – contracts specifying precise services or actions. They are not partnerships that bind the Catholic Church to the support of each and every activity of the partnering organization, in principle or in practice. So, back to our concern, once again unless the Catholic organization was willingly and knowingly supportive of the specific act to provide abortion, then the cooperation is not formal. So we are dealing with some kind of material cooperation in the, for Catholics, objective evil of abortion. Are there any circumstances in which such funding from a Catholic partner would be, although a material cooperation in the objective evil of abortion, justifiable? One can imagine a health clinic in Zimbabwe that provides a whole suite of desperately needed services in the fight against AIDS, which has infected large amounts of the population. A small aspect of their work is the provision of abortion. Is there any way for Catholics to assist in this terrible situation? Does the abortion service negate the goodness of the entire range of medical care, support and education given? Cannot the Catholic Church partner to support those specific aspects of the health care provider that are in concert with Catholic views? This dilemma, in one form or another, arises for all Catholic Health Care institutions that receive public money. So how do they proceed?

Notre Dame University (2010) has a series of guiding questions that, I think, help in such discernment processes. They summarize the kinds of questions necessary for discerning the practice of legitimate cooperation with non-Catholic institutions in morally ambiguous situations:

1. Are there alternative organizations which make a proportionate contribution to the common good yet without engaging in morally illicit activities and practices?
2. How great is the good to be achieved or the evil to be avoided by contributing to this organization?
3. How grave is the evil done or condoned by this organization?
4. How separate is the funded activity or practice from morally illicit activities and practices?
5. What is the likelihood of causing scandal by associating with the organization?

6. Can we credibly explain to the community that our association is both valuable to the work at hand and compatible with our Catholic character and mission?
7. What is the probability of effecting moral change in the organization by continuing to support it rather than by withdrawing support?  
(University of Notre Dame, 2010)

As you can see, these questions do not allow for simplistic answers. They require contextual, nuanced and specific judgments that are not absolute. They require much discernment, and presume an informed, and one would hope, compassionate Catholic conscience. Dialogue with Bishops and Church leadership is essential.

### **Partnering for Justice in a Broken World**

In the face of extraordinary suffering, poverty and injustice in the world, Development and Peace recognizes the critical importance of collaborating with non-Catholic partners (and Catholic ones too, of course) in the work to defend and promote human dignity and an equitable distribution of the world's goods. Operating across cultures, religions, modes of thought and customs, Development and Peace believes that it is possible to work with others who disagree with us in mutually respectful and beneficial ways that serve a common good.

In closing, I would like to quote the vision of the authors of the Canadian Health Ethics Guidelines (2000). They see partnering with non-Catholic institutions not primarily as a threat to Catholic identity, but as an opportunity for a truly incarnated presence of the Church's values in the world. In doing so, I think they encapsulate the vision of the Second Vatican Council as well, as it's expressed in the Church's service to our broken world (Church in the Modern World), in a spirit of respectful dialogue, and always seeking the good in the "other" (Declaration Concerning Non-Christian Religions), and in a justice seeking solidarity (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace).

Taking leadership and influencing public policy in our pluralistic society is a prophetic responsibility to which Catholic individuals and organizations are called. The principle of material cooperation may provide valuable direction not only for individuals but also for organizations under the sponsorship of a specific religious perspective and in partnership with organizations that may not share Catholic moral principles. Such a broadening of the boundaries regarding the use of the principle of legitimate cooperation makes it possible for Catholic organizations to consider entering into new partnership arrangements in order to implement and promote the Church's social teaching, the preferential option for the poor, and the dignity of the human person. In this way, religiously-based health care and social service organizations can

continue to provide a powerful presence and voice for these human values within society.

Development and Peace's struggle for justice in our world today is not a threat to the purity of our Church, but conversely one of its most transparent signs of God's reign of peace and justice.

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N.B. The reflections in this text are mine alone, as a Development and Peace member, and certainly cannot be said to represent the official views of Development and Peace nor the Catholic Church. I hope, however, that they have found faithful inspiration from both sources.

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