

## **Reflections on the Ten Principles of Catholic Social Teaching as a Biblical Guide to a Stewardship Ethos for Sustainable Development in Kenya**

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### ABSTRACT

Biblical theology offers nations foundational moral and ethical principles for guiding the strategy formulation and attainment of sustainable development goals. This paper seeks to discuss various Bible passages as they relate to the different Catholic social principles which are included in the Kenyan version of Vision 2030. The paper is based on the preliminary findings of an ethnographic study done on five organizations based in the Central and Western parts of Kenya, that won local or international awards for excellence in sustainable development, practiced over at least ten years. The study sought to understand how Biblical teachings inculcated in the organizations motivate sustainable development practices among them. It utilized semi-structured interview protocols administered to thirty-one individual respondents. Respondents consisted of staff members, beneficiaries, and directors. Data was transcribed and analyzed using NVIVO 12.4. The key findings were that the Bible provides teachings and resultant wisdom for development practices in a way that growing disciples of Christ can use to disciple others in their communities and marketplaces. Some critical principles and corresponding Biblical texts discussed are those concerning human dignity (Gen. 1; Ps. 147; Is. 46; Rom. 11:33), respect for human life (Eccl. 11:5; Dan. 5:23), freedom of association (Acts 2), participation, care for the poor and vulnerable (Deut. 15:11; James 2:5; Ezek. 22), solidarity (Gen. 4:9-12), stewardship (Gen. 1:29), subsidiarity (Matt. 25:14-30), human equality (Deut. 7; Gen. 15:6), and the principle of the common good (Eph. 4). Marketplace theology is not the preserve of theological institutions but the responsibility of every Christian leader and every citizen for the establishment of truly sustainable development. When stewardship is used as a foundational organizing principle, individuals can be encouraged to develop themselves as powerful actors in society, to the benefit of all.

Keywords: Biblical theology, sustainable development, Catholic social principles

### Introduction

In the last fifty years, the sustainable development movement has been developed to respond to the humanitarian crisis on planet earth concerning the poor stewardship of finite natural resources and the requisite socially cohesive structures required for the success of resource stewardship. The negative effects of this misuse have been affecting many communities worldwide with abject poverty topping the list of concerns in the sustainable development goals movement. For instance, demonstrations in Nairobi after the onset of Covid 19 infections (Senosi, 2020, p. 1) are an expression of civil unrest brought about by social inequalities that keep some segments of society trapped in unjust policing of communities while few benefit disproportionately from the crisis. Sustainable development goals were established to guide discourse on how communities can develop effective responses that consider everyone's needs. Proper stewardship of the earth's resources

requires healthy interpersonal relationships at personal, family, and extended societal levels. This paper is a reflection exercise on the principles of Catholic social teaching as they apply to just human relations which lend themselves to truly sustainable development since the power to sustain is vested in humanity through God's stewardship mandate. It focuses on specific texts of the Bible that provide instruction and commentary on critical societal issues of the day.

Christians, in their journey of discipleship and practice, are encouraged to take every opportunity to demonstrate how the Bible provides wisdom for every human issue. In Job 34:8, God challenges Job to compare his wisdom with God by asking him, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand." It is also important for humanity to ascribe all wisdom to God. An observation of the Kenyan sustainable development goals and the Vision 2030 shows the assumption that humanity inherently has the required wisdom to utilize the human, material, and natural resources without the input of the owner, creator, and the sustainer God himself.

Secondly, it encourages Christians to be disciples who grow in the knowledge of God by constantly engaging the Scriptures in study and application. In Psalms 119:11 David pledged to be a good student of God's Word by saying, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." Where inductive Bible study, expository preaching, children's Sunday schools and Bible clubs are available, Christians have the opportunity to develop, articulate and share a sound philosophy for Bible-based development practice.

Thirdly, it presents the Bible as the authority for life and practice of sustainable development so that when questions and contentious issues come up, Christians establish the practice of asking what the Word of God has to say about it. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states the following: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." A missional theology of development believes that the Bible is sufficient teaching for all that is needed for sustainable development. The Catholic church developed a list of social principles aimed at teaching and establishing their philosophy of social engagement.

The principles of Catholic social thought are drawn from papal documents, conciliar documents, and statements from Bishops' conferences in the past 100+ years. The documents, however, are best understood by studying the underpinnings of the principles of Scriptures and the lives and work of many men and women in the Christian tradition. The development of Catholic social thought continues today in both theory and practice. (University of Notre Dame, 2015)

While Christians from different denominations may have different sets of social engagement principles, this list from the Catholic church was adopted for general use in many settings. In Kenya they feature in Vision 2030. (Towards 2030 | Kenya Vision 2030, n.d.)

### **Defining the Term "Principle"**

Principles are moral rules or beliefs that help one know what is right and wrong, and that influence one's actions. Principles are what a person stands for in life; they direct one's life and act as a moral compass. In other words, they govern one's behavior. Principles are based on the personal values one holds dear. For example, if a person values nonviolence, he or she will never get into fights with others or behave aggressively. This behavior is prompted by the belief that he or she will never behave aggressively or violently. If one

values honesty, one will never tell lies, not even a white lie. Here, never telling lies is the individual's principle. A person who strongly believes that lying is wrong will never deviate from the truth, even if it brings personal harm. Since principles are sometimes equivalent to rules, they can be quite stern and unyielding. Although principles are collectively agreed upon by society, a person can have his own principles. Major laws in a country, (i.e., laws that make murder and robbery illegal) are based on the collective principles of the society that it is wrong to kill or rob (Hasa, 2016).

### The Ten Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

The Catholic Social Principles can be grouped roughly into three groups showing a

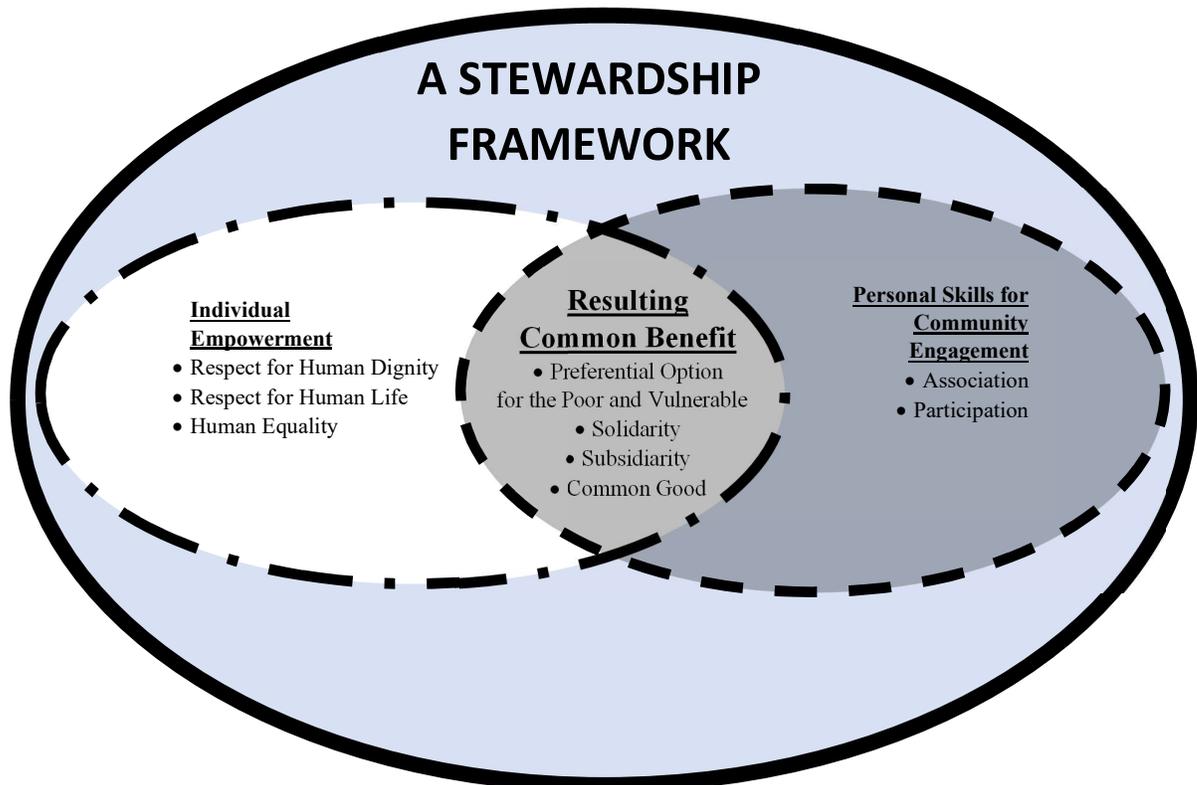


Figure 1: A Conceptual Framework for the Ten Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

movement from personal empowerment and sense of value through the acquisition of skills that are useful in community engagement. The resulting value created is beneficial to all. All three groups can be undergirded by the principle of stewardship as a foundation for all development. Individual empowerment will result from individual awareness of personal respect for human and dignity, equal among all. This respect is an aspect of stewardship that promotes the development of personal strengths useful in communal engagement. Individuals learn how to act through association and participation, another form of stewardship of social relationships. The resulting benefits of personal strength result in common good for all, an awareness and initiative in showing solidarity with the vulnerable and poor in society in a way that empowers them to become independent to the best of their ability. The proper stewardship of human, material and intellectual resources makes for sustainable development.

The Catholic social principles were operationalized to bring together Catholic thought on the foundational values emanating from Scripture necessary for community engagement and development. From the initial comprehensive list of ten, different people and Catholic

organizations have adopted different sets, or highlighted the importance of some over others. In general, all the principles are articulated in a harmonious way to communicate the same basic message of the authority of Scripture, the value of human life and the responsibility of each person within each community to contribute to the welfare of others, in a fair and equitable manner.

### **The Principle of Stewardship**

People show respect for the Creator by their stewardship of creation. They have a responsibility to care for and utilize responsibly and equitably, the natural resources as stewards and trustees, not just as consumers. As people work toward making these principles a reality, good stewardship also means making careful and responsible decisions on the resources entrusted to them.

“The Greek word for stewardship, *oikonomia*, is a compound of two words: *Oikos*, household, and *nomos*, which means law or rule. In ancient culture, the words used together meant the administration or management of a household.”(Peel, 2010, p. 201) In this context, the steward was put in charge of the household which consisted not only of the family homestead but the workers who lived here, the businesses that were transacted, the farms and animals that were taken care of- indeed the whole estate of the person who owned it. The steward only held wealth in trust on behalf of the owner upon whose return an account would be presented.

Environmental stewardship can be understood from the creation mandate that God gave to Adam and Eve. God instilled in them the capacity for stewarding/ruling over creation and for being fruitful- the capacity that God himself demonstrated in the creation of the universe and the generous provision of the earth’s resources (Genesis 1:29). In light of this, Christians have the opportunity to explain their role in sustainable development to the community by showing that they account to God for their work in administering the resources put in their care.

Stewardship is also applied to the social aspect of sustainable development. Humans must steward relationships between individuals and local community and by extension, the government that is set up to provide safe boundaries for all citizens. Relational stewardship is the foundation of sustainable development under God the creator.

Economic stewardship requires people to create and use wealth (Miller & Guthrie, 2001) in a way that considers these principles, particularly the focus on the poor; widows, orphans and refugees. Economic stewardship creates policies that protect business opportunities from the monopoly of a few at the expense of the many who may not have easy access to economic opportunities such as training, credit, networking in trade.

### **The Principle of Respect for Human Dignity**

Human dignity is the fuel that propels action as individuals feel safe in their standing as humans of value. Dignity strengthens character and productivity and confidence. It is an important building block for sustainable development as explained below:

Human dignity emerges neither from what people accomplish or own, but because they are created in the image and likeness of God. Consequently, every person is worthy of respect simply by virtue of being a human being. People do not lose the right to being treated with respect because of disability, poverty, age, lack of success, or race, let alone gain the right to be treated with greater respect because of what they own or accomplish. (*Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*, n.d.)

The first sustainable development goal is to "End poverty in all its forms everywhere" (SOGESID, 2013). Poverty is a key expression of the loss of human dignity because it assumes that there are not enough resources available in the world to take care of its population of over seven billion people. In contrast, Biblical theology shows that God created the heavens and the earth, with all the resources required for healthy and happy living. In Genesis 1, God created water, air, sunshine, soil, and seeds as the key resources that humanity would use in the creation of life-sustaining wealth. God gave Adam and Eve the mandate to tend these resources through wisdom and work. The Bible teaches that human dignity is first derived from identity in God because Adam and Eve were created by God in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:24-27). People have human dignity because they were created in God's image (Psalms 147:5; Isaiah 46:9-10; Romans 11:33). (BST and Crosswalk Staff, 2019) One is therefore responsible for reflecting who God is in expression of character, choices, values, and actions.

When God instructed the Israelites to celebrate the Feast of Weeks he asked them to remember their servitude in Egypt by including the servants, Levites, foreigners, fatherless and widows among in their "rejoicing before the Lord (their) God at the place he would designate for his Name (Deuteronomy 16:10-12). Inclusion in celebration is one of the most dignifying acts a society can do for the poor. It easily restores physical and spiritual well-being to those who were traumatized by their vulnerability. It gives them hope that their fortunes could turn around, but it is also founded on access to development resources. The Israelites were required to give offerings primarily out of agricultural produce based on farming activities that produced wheat for flour and animals for a burnt offering. In other instances, minerals such as gold and silver were required based on access to land where these mines were known to be located.

In John 13:13-16, Jesus demonstrates to his disciples the stewardship principle of servanthood by washing their feet and asking them to wash one another's feet after his example of humility (Phil. 2:1-11). This is how they were to demonstrate their identity as disciples after Christ. Christian communities must see the importance of utilizing principles, illustrations, and teachings from the Bible to point people to it as the source of our philosophy for social action and sustainable living. For example, they must lead efforts to restore poor people to their God-given identity as his children.

### **The Principle of Respect for Human Life**

Human life is the foundation for human relationships and community development. It is the most basic unity of society and therefore is important to underscore...Every person, from the moment of conception to natural death has inherent dignity and a right to life, consistent with the dignity that is ours as human beings. The Catholic rendition sees the sacredness of human life as part of any moral vision for a just and good society. (*Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*, n.d.)

Human dignity and the human right to life are closely related because the right to life is an expression of human dignity. Every human regardless of physical or psychological status and ability has the right to life because life is God-given. For instance, children, as minors and dependent on adults for their care have the right to care, nurture, and opportunity to develop themselves as independent adults capable of taking care of themselves and contributing to a healthy and happy society. For this reason, every human, especially powerful adults such as medical doctors, parents, and guardians have a sacred and ethical responsibility to protect children to the age of adult independent life. This also means that children conceived from the unfortunate circumstances of defilement and therefore deemed in

some cases unwanted by their traumatized mothers, or conceived with physical or mental deformities, once conceived into unique individuals with personal identity are by that fact alone valuable before God and humanity by extension.

In Ecclesiastes 11:5 it is said that King Solomon addressed the assembly and said that “Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.” This is one of the verses that is used to teach the moral principle of respect for human life because it shows the sovereignty of the God of creation who hold human life in his hands (Daniel 5:23b) and requires stewardship of the life, talents, gifts for service that he instilled in humanity at creation (Genesis 1:22) Contemporary science is the art of discovering what God created and so humanity has no right to determine who shall live or who shall die, apart from God.

In many instances, the murder of innocent people, especially children for sacrifice before heathen gods, was an abomination before the Lord (Genesis 4:10-11; 2Kings 16:3). It was a regular characteristic of heathen practice.

“Everything comes from him,” scripture states, “and exists by his power and is intended for his glory” (Romans 11:36). “Give to the Lord the glory he deserves” (I Chronicles 16:29). The Bible admonishes us to “do it all for the glory of God” (I Corinthians 10:31), “so that in all things God may be glorified” (I Peter 4:11). To bring glory to God—that is, to exalt him, lift him, give him praise, to reflect upon him honorable—is our purpose in life. (JMM Team, 2016)

The apparent weakness of Sustainable Development Goals apart from Biblical theology is that it assumes human authority over life, apart from the authority of God who created and owns the universe and has spoken clearly about what he will for creation is. God created humanity, the sacred, complex network of attributes that makes the human being. He alone has the authority to give and take life. Job in his misery at the loss of his children, his animals, and his wealth concluded that God who gives life has the authority to take it (Job 1:21). In Deuteronomy 32:39 Moses in his song depicts God as one who owns life. He wounds and he heals. No one can thwart his plans.

### **The Principle of Human Equality**

Human equality sets the stage for how humans will relate as they seek self fulfillment in their lives. The principle is stated as follows:

Given that every human being is entitled to respect and dignity merely because she/he has been created in the image and likeness of God, it follows that there is radical equality among all human beings. After all, as George Cladis points out: “competition is alien within God.” This principle lies close to the surface in every Christian. We talk of it in terms of giving people a fair go. (*Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*, n.d.)

The main point is that every gender, age group, and race is intrinsically equal and should therefore have the same opportunities for self-development and fulfillment, through the equal distribution of resources. The book of Genesis is instrumental in our understanding of the place of humanity in the universe. In Genesis 1:27 it is written that God created mankind in his image, both male and female reflect the image of God.

The principle of human equality is closely related to the principles of human dignity, respect for human life, solidarity, subsidiarity and common good. These principles together endow humans with the power, authority, opportunity, and also responsibility to use personal and communal resources to develop themselves into fulfilled communities, able to take care of themselves, and able to contribute to the wellbeing of their community members. Equality assumes that there are no people more valuable than others or more preferred than others. There have been times when Christians have led society in placing the nation of Israel above others of God's people, by virtue of their interpretation of Deuteronomy 7 where God calls Israel out of the nations of the world to be a chosen and special people. This interpretation of Scripture fails to put God's words in context. The choosing of Israel as God's beloved people is conditional on their obedience to live holy lives before God as an example of true godliness before the unreached peoples of the world. Failure to do so led to their destruction and enslavement by heathen kingdoms, most notably Babylon. Their example as people after God's own heart was expected to result into the transformation of heathen nations, also into God loving and God serving communities. This was a missional assignment, not a stamp of undue favor.

“...many Christians wonder why one nation should be called “God's chosen people.” The answer to this question is bound up with God's purpose for Israel. When God promised Abraham that he would become the father of a great nation, He also promised that he would bless all peoples through that nation. Therefore, Israel was to be a channel as well as a recipient of blessing. It is clear that God's promise to Abraham to bless the whole world through him is still being fulfilled. The life, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ, and the existence and influence of the church today, all came about through God's choice of Israel. (Nelson, 2019, p. 188)

The calling of Israel was to commission a people of God who would live holy lives that would draw Gentile nations back to God (Deuteronomy 14:21; 1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 2:10). They were to remember their own experience as slaves back in Egypt and that the Lord delivered them through the work of his servant Moses and others who came after him such as Joshua. He would lead them by the hand to make them “a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:6). Through their obedience, they would show humanity the way back to holiness before God and be a guide for heathen nations back in reconciliation with God. Before God, all would be redeemed; both are valued equally for they, through faith, are all Abraham's children or children born of faith (Genesis 15:6).

### **The Principle of Association**

Having established the value of human life, we now turn to relational principles on the assumption that human beings were not created to thrive alone but in community.

The human person is not only sacred but also social. Society cannot consider a person simply as an isolated individual but as part of a rich tapestry of relationships. When making decisions that impact on the lives of others, society must consider how it impacts on that person's connections with family, friends, and the wider community. (*Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*, n.d.)

The principle of association presents both individual rights and responsibilities that enable thriving. The early church is the best demonstration of God's will for humanity's social environment. In Acts 2:42-47, the early church thrived because of community. They

supported one another through their close fellowship and mutual service- and so their numbers grew exponentially. In Acts 2:42-47 one reads the following:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The Acts 2 passage above shows that Bible-teaching was central to the development of a community way of living because each of them subscribed to the same life philosophy. This shared philosophy fostered unity as shown in their willingness to share their wealth as each had need, producing God-honouring joy and worship. Many were drawn to this community because it responded deeply to their felt needs. In this way of life, the earth's resources become sufficient for everyone's need, without waste. God is worshipped and honoured as creator, sustainer, giver, and humanity are taught frequently their stewardship mandate. No one has to suffer through poverty that feels shaming.

UNRISD researched the "Social dimensions of sustainable development" and found that "unequal social structures and relations have repercussions for how societies employ their natural resources, and that social inequalities and ecological degradation tend to be mutually reinforcing"(UNRISD, n.d., p. 1) One of the solutions they proposed was the crafting of "socially sensitive environmental policies that strengthen the coping capacities and resilience of vulnerable groups...". Policies rely on the goodwill of human agency for correct implementation. Christian practitioners of sustainable development projects have the opportunity and responsibility to demonstrate how their faith teachings provide effective and lasting goodwill.

### **The Principle of Participation**

Participation is what facilitates individual expression within the group. People have a right to shape their own lives and the society in which they live. They should participate in decision processes that impact their lives and cannot be considered passive recipients of other people's decisions. We each have a responsibility to be shapers of the kind of world in which we wish to live. "The ultimate injustice is for a person or group to be treated actively or abandoned passively as if they were non-members of the human race. To treat people this way is effectively to say they simply do not count as human beings" (*Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*, n.d.).

This principle is related to that of association but requires members of society to go beyond membership to productive activity. They must together and in harmony create and sustain the life and reality that they wish for themselves. Christian community members have the opportunity to live in a God-honouring way that illustrates the place of God in the community, through demonstrating and teaching what those God's principles for harmony are. According to Jeffrey Kranz,

"One-another" verses are used one hundred times in ninety-four New Testament verses. Forty-seven of those verses instruct the followers of Jesus. Paul wrote 60% of

them. One-third of the “one-another” commands deal with church relationships. Another one-third “instructs Christians to love one another”. Another 15% stress an attitude of humility and deference among believers and twelve other miscellaneous commands talk of prayer, hospitality, motivation for good deeds, comfort, truth-telling, and bearing each other’s burdens. ”(Kranz, 2014)

These Bible teachings give direct instruction for life not only for Christians but for others in the community. One exercise that has tested the boundaries of participation is the Kenyan Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) (Haji, 2019).

In May 2021, the BBI was ruled “unconstitutional and unlawful” in a high court judgment that asserted that the process that the initiative used was faulty in part because of insufficient participation by citizen, not necessarily the contents. In this case, all parties preferred to use the court system to determine the way forward. Part of the judgment also stated that in many instances, there was not sufficient quorum in committees to satisfy the court that there was a sufficient number of ordinary voters involved in the process (Mbaku, 2021). This ruling is being held as a breakthrough in Kenyan politics where the autonomy of the judiciary has been upheld, in contrast to previous actions by the ruling elite to resort to the strife that has been witnessed in the countries when disagreements of national importance have polarized the citizens. While the defendants had asserted that the initiative sought to do away with pre- and post-election violence by seeking the views of Kenyan citizens on the way forward, prosecution responded that constitutional amendments require far more checks and balances and that the exercise should refrain from creating a good number of top government leadership positions for the proponent’s advantage.

While it is clear that guided and fair participation is powerful because the people feel valued in their participation on national issues and they get to experience the outcomes of their decisions, how a country manages to steer its politics is the test of their integrity. If citizens were to fully apply Biblical ethics, full participation would protect the benefits accruing from political discourse.

### **The Principle of Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

While human rights and responsibilities are to be protected, these principles assume that some will be better equipped to live in a productive way that contributes to community welfare. For that reason, community consensus considers the plight of the poor and vulnerable as a priority.

In a world where we see deepening divisions between rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless, the Catholic tradition reminds one that God stands firmly on the side of the most marginalized members of society. While every person’s needs are important, we must consider first and foremost how the lives of the most vulnerable people are impacted or enhanced by the decisions we make. (*Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*, n.d.)

A Christian view of social principles is that God demonstrates the value of caring for the poor and therefore, Christians are invited to respond to God’s values and actions. A common Biblical theme on the care and consideration for the most vulnerable in society is that of the widow, the orphan, and the alien. Deuteronomy 14:29; 27:19; Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3; and Ezekiel 22:7 are some of the verses that command society to care for the most vulnerable and to desist from harming, marginalizing, or oppressing them. In Deuteronomy 14:29 God’s blessings for Israel’s productivity were dependent on their just and fair treatment of the

Levites, widows, orphans, and refugees. The Levites were included in this group requiring special care because the law did not give them their material inheritance, preferring to place them under the care of the nation as a whole. In Jeremiah 7:1-8, the peace and prosperity of the nation of Israel in the place he allowed them to settle was also conditional on their treatment of the most vulnerable among them. Similar to the declarations of other prophets sent by God, Ezekiel speaks judgment against Israel for disregarding the plight of the poor.

Those who are strong are urged to include and strengthen those who are vulnerable among them to avert God's judgment. This is mutually beneficial also because empowered people make for good customers for the goods and services produced by wealthier businesspeople. A society that takes care of the vulnerable among them has the favour of God and grows in sustainability because everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy life. It is to be expected that the poor and vulnerable also turn against the societies that marginalize them. Some turn to crime and conflict so that those who try to live near them while ignoring their plight soon find themselves facing insecurity. An improved general standard of living improves security as motivation for crime tends to be directly related to lack of the basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, education, and health.

### **The Principle of Solidarity**

Humans are their brothers' and sisters' keepers. Learning to practice the virtue of solidarity means learning that "loving one's neighbor" is not, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "...a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all responsible for all." *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987) | *John Paul II*, n.d.).

The term "my brother's keeper" comes from Genesis 4:9 where God asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" His response was to state that he did not know where his brother was, and to ask God the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" This is the Bible story of a conversation between God and Cain where God expected Cain to be concerned for his brother's welfare because they were siblings, but Cain was too jealous of his brother for his acceptable sacrifice to celebrate with him. It is good to read here that God was grieved with Cain for killing his brother Abel and that he punished him. Genesis 4:10-12 states the following-

The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

God showed solidarity with Cain's weakness even though Cain was responsible for his brother Abel's death. The mercy of God was shown in his decision to protect him from similar fate even though that is what he deserved (Genesis 4:15). The penalties of sin and the grace of God that accompanies it are powerful themes in community members extension of solidarity with weak members. Christians apply the mercy of God to others, mercy that they do not deserve, following after God's act of mercy on their lives, chief of which is the giving of his son Jesus Christ for the punishment for the sins of mankind.

Solidarity is also experienced when those who are powerful, rich and skilled in development and wealth creation show solidarity with the poor and uneducated by taking care of them. The elderly, widows, orphans and refugees are particularly vulnerable and so

the powerful members of community are welcome to use their strength to build them up to healthy livelihoods. The poor themselves frequently act in solidarity among themselves not only relying on outside help. The church has shown solidarity for the poor by providing church buildings as meeting places, education, medical services, business training and initiatives which has resulted in the growth of congregations (John Paul II, 1987).

### **The Principle of Subsidiarity**

Subsidiarity is another principle focused on communal relationships especially between the strong and endowed and the weak and poor members of society. We benefit from the following explanation that:

The word subsidiarity comes from the Latin word *subsidium* which means help, aid, or support. The principle of subsidiarity means determining the right amount of help or support that is needed to accomplish a task or to meet an obligation: “not too much” (taking over and doing it for the other: thereby creating learned helplessness or overdependence) and “not too little” (standing back and watching people thrash about, thereby increasing frustration and perhaps hopelessness). The principle might be better summarized as ‘no bigger than necessary, no smaller than appropriate’. (*Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*, n.d., p. 1)

This principle attempts to maintain a balance between unhealthy dependency and personal autonomy. In many communities, the provision of infrastructure such as roads, electricity, schools, and water require the intervention of the national government which has been tasked with the responsibility of collecting taxes for use in development projects that local communities cannot undertake on their own. However, communities retain the right and responsibilities to services that enable them to thrive, develop and be creative - rights such as just wages, security of employment, fair and reasonable working conditions, and union membership and responsibilities such as education, innovation, participation, gainful work, and harmony.

Social harmony cannot be effective without the full participation of residents. They know their neighbors and so they should be able to develop their strategies for mutual support, development, and protection. This is the genesis of the Kenyan *nyumba kumi* (approximately ten households) initiative that seeks to empower small clusters of people in their delineated localities to take action for social issues and build the harmonious living spaces they desire. Though its focus started as a Kenyan national police service community policing initiative, communities have grown in their understanding of their power and responsibility in maintaining peace and in other spheres of life such as identification of vulnerable households, children unable to access education, basic healthcare, maternity services for expectant mothers and unemployed youth. Ngige (2018) discussed above in the principle of participation, everyone has an opportunity and is responsible to participate in the welfare of the community as far as they can. Pope Pius XI’s encyclical letter *Quadragesimo Anno*, which introduced this principle, goes as far as to say that, “It is an injustice and a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do”(Catholic Parliamentary Office, n.d.). To this end, technical training and fieldwork experience will help people become financially independent and increase their self-worth.

Matthew 25:14-30 is a parable that Jesus taught about a certain man who vested part of his wealth to different recipients, for them to utilize and invest. They came back with varying results. Ronald E. Vallet describes what those talents were by saying the following:

...everything you have and everything you are comprises the talents entrusted to you by God. This includes your abilities: each precious moment of every day, every week, every month, every year was given to you; your material and financial resources; your relationships with loved ones and friends; the gift of God's salvation and redemption in Jesus Christ- in short, your very life! All of this is entrusted to you by God. And you are called to be God's steward. (NIV Stewardship Study Bible, 2019).

Subsidiarity, therefore, requires all people to take what God who created them has vested in them, adding what family, community, and government provide to come up with new wealth and value. All agencies above and outside of a person can enable this personal utilization of resources for their own and community good. This is not only a gift but a personal responsibility to develop into a good member of society. These boundaries and corresponding enablement's guard against learned helplessness because people in a person's sphere of influence promote innovation, creativity, and growth and punish inactivity and laziness. In Acts 2:42-47, the believers shared what they had in common so that no one needed to suffer needlessly. Further, in 2 Thess. 3:10-13 Paul gave a rule to the church that "if a man shall not work, he shall not eat." This is the spectrum of expectations that keep societies healthy and productive.

### **The Principle of Common Good**

Common good envisions individuals in community as having value, opportunity and responsibility for shared life. Community becomes an organizing entity with its own characteristics. "A community is genuinely healthy when every single person is flourishing. This is not the utilitarian formula of the greatest good for the greatest number, but the moral foundation of the greatest good for all, simply on the basis that they are human beings and therefore inherently worthy of respect" (Chalmers, 2020).

The emphasis here is that each and every one is valued regardless of their physical, economic, social, psychological, and emotional status. Everyone with citizenship in any one country/nation or community has the right to a place to live, thrive, and serve. Everyone also has the responsibility to see beyond his or her own needs to those of people around. This means that each person looks out not only for himself but also looks out for others. This is the distilled common good- what is common to all. What comes out of the appreciation of each is the concept of the shared good. The common good harmonizes human life expectations for a healthy life, focused on what most people need and how economies of scale can be used to create optimal resources at affordable costs.

In Acts 2:42-47, the principle of association is further strengthened by the principle of the common good because it becomes a foundational ideal that brings all other principles together. The members of the early church experienced the power of unity, shared wealth, fellowship, thought, and practice. Commonality creates power in and of itself, becoming an entity with a certain philosophy, an identity that can cause change and growth and safety for its members. Individual members, having found it hard to thrive on their own, experience the genuine unity of the body of Christ in a way that does away with the struggles of alienation while in Roman occupation.

Unity fosters security, provision, hope, worship, and therefore life - God among his people as shown in Christ's vision for his body, the church. In Ephesians 4 and Acts 2:42-47 the description of the body of Christ depicts what would be considered the common good. The triune God is available to all of us as the body of Christ, through the sacraments and

transformational liturgies that make us one. We have the opportunity to grow as disciples through the development of character traits of humility, gentleness, patience, love, unity of the Spirit, peace, kindness, tenderness of heart, and forgiveness of each one's sins. We are appointed to different offices as apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers as we find the opportunity to serve one another. The goal of the common good is to equip each one for excellent service in faith and knowledge and love of God. By doing so we will build character strength against the vices of falsehood, anger, theft, corruption, bitterness, wrath, slander, and malice. There will be a place for everyone and everyone will know where they belong.

### Conclusion

In practice, each of these principles is the subject of papal encyclicals and corresponding heated debate from many social quarters. The purpose of the discussion here is not to engage each of the positions stated but to illustrate the value of engaging the Scriptures in dialogue on our understanding and application of what they teach. Christians have the opportunity and responsibility in Kenya to promote Biblical theology in all aspects of life and development work. In doing so, Christian faith and teachings are applied in life in a way that highlight their continued relevance in an increasingly post-Christian world.

The principles are focused on human relationships at a personal, communal and national level because the social aspects of sustainable development are the foundation for comprehensive sustainability. Human beings are the agents of sustainability under the tutelage of God who is creator, owner and sustainer of the universe. The three groups of principles are inter-related because the motivational force and support comes from each direction to the others resulting in the creation of much social and material wealth and peace. This is the goal of multi-generational sustainability.

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