

In the extraction, management, and use of resources, human rights must be respected. Preference must be given to the rights of indigenous peoples and those who are marginalized by poverty of because of race and gender

*Take your wrong-doing out of my sight.
Cease doing evil. Learn to do good,
Search for justice, discipline the violent,
Be just to the orphan, plead for the widow.*

Isaiah 1:16-17

At the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), in which Pope John XXIII “opened the windows” of the church to the contemporary world, the community of believers were defined as the “People of God”. This understanding suggests that all persons, not just the privileged or powerful, are endowed with dignity and embraced equally by divine love.

And among the People of God, those who are the most vulnerable, such as the orphan and widow of Isaiah’s day, or the economically, socially, and politically oppressed of our own time, merit special ecclesial concern.

Amidst the death-dealing poverty and social injustice that have pockmarked their lands for generations, the Latin American bishops, at their 1968 meeting in Medellin, Colombia, declared that the Church must adopt a “preferential option for the poor”. This notion has since become a cornerstone of Catholic social teaching, affirmed in magisterial pronouncements around the world, as well as by Pope John Paul II in numerous teachings, including his 1991 encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*.

From the underside

Thus, when reflecting on the social and ecological impacts of the mining industry, for example, the Church, as the People of God, is compelled to view these impacts “from the underside,” as it were, attempting to read these processes through “the prisms of the poor”, who now, according to the World Bank, tragically account for 53 percent of the human family.

As faith groups use these lenses to look at the extraction, management, and use of the Earth’s resources, particularly in nations of the Global South, they are often deeply disturbed by what they see. These operations have resulted at times in unconscionable human rights violations and ecological destruction, including the displacement of aboriginal peoples from their homelands, the contamination of water and soil for impoverished farmers, violation of workers’ and women’s rights, assaults, and even murder by security forces.

Moreover, despite promises of prosperity, many countries in the Global South with tremendous natural resources continue to languish in poverty. As mine tailings, strip-mined landscapes and decapitated mountain ranges reveal, along with the many ravaged communities surrounding them, the oppression of the Earth often marches hand-in-hand with the oppression of the poor.

From the North

Yet, such conditions are not relegated to countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa alone.

In Appalachia, for example, an economically depressed area in the Eastern part of the U.S. that has been plumbed and scraped for generations for its large coal deposits, poverty and ecological destruction are among the bitter harvests of the region’s mining legacy. As the Appalachian Catholic Bishops have observed:



“There is a saying in the region [Appalachia] that ‘coal is king’. That’s not exactly right. The kings are those who control big coal, and the profits and power that come with it. Many of these kings don’t live in the region. The way of life which these corporate giants create is called by some ‘technological rationalization’. Its forces contain the promise of a better world, but too often its forces become perverted, hostile to the dignity of the Earth and its people. Its destructive growth patterns pollute the air, foul the water, rape the land. The driving force behind this perversion is ‘maximization of profit’, a principle which too often converts itself into an idolatrous power.” (*This Land Is Home to Me*. 1975)



oppressed in their struggles to transform society. For, as Jesus declared, “When you did it unto these, the least of my brethren, you did it unto me.” (*Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis*, The Episcopal Commission for Social Action, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, December 22, 1982.)

This message has been articulated powerfully by the world synod of bishops, “Listening to the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures, and hearing the appeal of a world that by its perversity contradicts the plan of its

My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice... This poor man called, and the Lord heard him. Psalms 34: 2, 6

The Lord hears the cry of the poor, even when governments, corporations, and ordinary citizens do not. This is why the church is compelled to bear witness to God’s love of all persons and of creation itself, when the Earth is ravenously and irresponsibly ripped open for her riches, and the poor and vulnerable are robbed of their land, or oppressed in their work, or assaulted or murdered when they speak out for their human dignity.

As the Social Action Commission of the Canadian Bishops reminds us, “In the tradition of the prophets, Jesus dedicated his ministry to bringing ‘good news to the poor’ and ‘liberty to the oppressed’. As Christians, we are called to follow Jesus by identifying with the victims of injustice, by analyzing the dominant attitudes and structures that cause human suffering, and by actively supporting the poor and

“After many years of protesting and pleading, we have begun to take responsibility for our own liberation. We have gathered together to form a people, the masters of our own destiny. We have realized that Jesus was just like us. He was born into poverty. He did not personify a king but lived as one of the poor and the oppressed. He stood up for the impoverished, supported their cause and blessed them (Luke 6:20).”

Christians of the Third World, *The Road to Damas*

Creator, we have shared our awareness of the Church’s vocation to be present in the heart of the world by proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted.” (*Justice in the World*, World Synod of Catholic Bishops, 1971, no. 5.) In being present in the heart of the world, we remember Jesus’ promise to his friends, “Whatever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me”. (Matthew 25:40)

This text illustrates one of the six principles that underlie **DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE’s** 2006-2011 education program on the just management, control and distribution of the earth’s resources. **The texts were written by Lise Baroni, Michel Côté, Anne Marie Dalton, Heather Eaton and Stephen Scharper**, under the supervision of the Theology Committee of **DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE**.

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