

## Catholic Social Justice Principles: An African Philosophical Response

Kizito O\* and Juma F

Department of Philosophy, History and Religious Studies, Njoro, Kenya

### Abstract

Catholic Social Justice teaching is the body of doctrine developed by the Catholic Church on matters of poverty and wealth, economics, social organization and the role of the state. Its foundations are widely considered to have been laid by Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum*, which advocated economic distributism and condemned both Capitalism and Socialism, although its roots can be traced to the writings of Catholic thinkers such as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine of Hippo, and is also derived from concepts present in the Bible. Among the social issues addressed by the teachings is the place and relevance of work in human life. According to the teachings, Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected-the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative. How can these teachings be made relevant to the African context and Church? An attempt to answer this important question is embedded in the dialogue between this body of doctrine and the African world view. Such a dialogue must consider the nature African thought systems and world-views as found in African Philosophy and more specifically the philosophies of Ubuntu and Communalism. This paper therefore discusses the responses of African Philosophy in contextualize the Catholic Social Teachings in Africa.

**Keywords:** Catholic; Social justice; *Rerum Novarum*; African philosophy; Ubuntu; Communalism

### Introduction

Catholic social justice teaching is the body of doctrine developed by the Catholic Church on matters of social justice, involving issues of poverty and wealth, economics, social organization and the role of the state. Modern Catholic social teaching embodies social principles and moral teaching that is articulated in the papal, conciliar, and other official documents issued since the late nineteenth century and dealing with the economic, political, and social order, Hobgood [1]. This teaching is rooted in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures as well as in traditional philosophical and theological teachings of the Church. Its foundations are widely considered to have been laid by Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum*, which advocated economic distributism and condemned both Capitalism and Socialism, although its roots can be traced to the writings of Catholic thinkers such as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine of Hippo, and is also derived from concepts present in the Bible. The principles of Catholic social teaching, though in most cases far older in origin, first began to be combined together into a system in the late nineteenth century. The teachings have been continually developed through observation, analysis and action, and are there to guide Catholics and Christians in general in the responses they make to the social problems of the ever-changing world. Popes after Leo XIII have added to and developed the Church's body of social teaching, principally through the medium of encyclical letters. Examples of such encyclical letters include:

1) 2009 Pope Benedict XVI encyclical; *Caritas in Veritate* or Charity in truth. This encyclical builds on the themes of another encyclical; *Populorum Progressio*, expanding on the "many overlapping layers" of development. Inequality, respect for life, the right to religious freedom, the use of technology and environmental protection are among the many "layers" addressed in the encyclical.

2) 2005 Pope Benedict XVI encyclical; *Deus Caritas Est* or God is love. Part I of this encyclical is a reflection on the forms of "love"-eros, philia, agape, emphasizing God's love for human beings and the intrinsic connection between God's love and human love. Part II

deals with the practical requirement to love one's neighbor, and the application of this in the Church's charitable activity.

3) 1995 Pope John Paul II encyclical; *Evangelium Vitae* or the Gospel of life. This encyclical presents the Church's teaching on the sanctity and inviolability of human life, from conception to natural death, dealing specifically with abortion, euthanasia and capital punishment. It also covers the proper use of sex and stresses the importance of the family. It also emphasizes the need to care for the sick and the poor.

4) 1991 Pope John Paul II encyclical; *Centesimus Annus* or the Hundredth year. Written to commemorate the 100th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, this encyclical addresses in a modern context the issues in *Rerum Novarum*. It emphasizes the injustice which prevails in the sharing of the goods of the earth between rich and poor nations, and within nations. Environmental protection is mentioned, and the encyclical affirms the right to private property, rejecting communism and socialism.

5) 1981 Pope John Paul II encyclical; *Laborem Exercens* or on Human work. This encyclical commemorates the 90th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, revisiting the rights and dignity of workers. It examines the opposition between those who contribute capital to the production process and those who contribute labor. Pope John Paul II develops a spirituality of work, considering work to be "a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question".

6) 1961 Pope John Paul II encyclical; *Mater et Magistra* or Mother and teacher. The Church's mission is the salvation of souls

\*Corresponding author: Kizito O, Egerton University, Department of Philosophy, History and Religion Studies, Njoro, Kenya, Tel: 0725348040; E-mail: [odockkizito@gmail.com](mailto:odockkizito@gmail.com)

Received October 06, 2014; Accepted July 15, 2015; Published July 20, 2015

Citation: Kizito O, Juma F (2015) Catholic Social Justice Principles: An African Philosophical Response. Arts Social Sci J 6: 107. doi:10.4172/2151-6200.1000107

Copyright: © 2015 Kizito O, et al. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

and the transformation of the society. This encyclical addresses the socio-economic conditions and the responsibility of individual Catholics and the Church to work to overcome excessive inequalities. Wealthier nations should assist poorer nations. Advances in science and technology need to be critiqued because they have the power to improve the human condition, but may also pose dangers to life and to human rights.

7) 1931 Pope Pius XI encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* or After forty years. Forty years after *Rerum Novarum* this encyclical further develops the Church's teaching on labor and industrialization, and includes strong critiques of unrestrained capitalism, communism and classism.

8) 1891 Pope Leo XIII encyclical *Rerum Novarum* or of New things. This encyclical is acknowledged as the first to address social issues. It is in response to the conditions faced by workers following the onset of the industrial revolution. Issues it addresses include unbridled capitalism, socialism, the relationship between worker and employer, a living wage, the relationship between classes and the preferential option for the poor.

## Catholic Social Justice Principles

Himes [2] lists and summarizes ten principles which embody the Catholic Social Justice Teachings as follows:

### The principle of respect for human dignity

Every person is created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ. 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. People can never forfeit their right to be treated with respect because God, not us, assigns it.

### The principle of respect for human life

An implication of the first principle is that every person, from the moment of conception to natural death has an inherent dignity and a right to life consistent with the dignity that is ours as human beings. The Catholic tradition sees the sacredness of human life as part of any moral vision for a just and good society.

### The principle of association

The human person is not only sacred, but also social. We are born in the image and likeness of God, whose essence is community, the diverse community of Father, Son and Spirit. There are three persons in God, but only one God. At the heart of God we find diversity that is a cause of liveliness rather than of division. To put it bluntly: we are our true selves when we relate well to others, not when we are isolated individuals.

### The principle of participation

People have a right, indeed a duty to participate in shaping a more just and human society, seeking together the common well and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. "All people need to take an active role in the development of socio-economic, political and cultural life. They should be shapers of history (subjects), not just passive recipients of other people's decisions" (objects).

### The principle of preferential option for the poor and vulnerable

In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor,

the catholic tradition recalls the story of the last judgment (Mt 25.31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. The United States' Bishops put it well: "The needs of the poor take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion".

### The principle of solidarity

We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. Learning to practice the virtue of solidarity means learning that 'loving our neighbor' has global dimensions in an interdependent world. As Pope John Paul II has said, Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. 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 really responsible for all.

### The principle of stewardship

Respect for the Creator is shown by stewardship of creation. Humanity has a responsibility to care for the world's goods as stewards and trustees, not primarily, let alone merely, as consumers. The Queensland Catholic Bishops issued a Pastoral Letter on the Great Barrier Reef in June 2004. They write: "We are all in the process of learning how to better safeguard creation, respect the rhythms of nature and live more sustainably. In the interests of planetary health we are all called to participate in respectful dialogue, to leave a lighter ecological footprint and firmer spiritual one, so that generations yet unborn will inherit a world, in the words of the Pope, 'closer to the design of the Creator.'" Queensland Catholic Bishops.

### The principle of subsidiarity

The word *subsidiarity* comes from the Latin word *subsidium* which means help, aid or support. The principle of subsidiarity means being wide-eyed, clearly 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). "Instead of 'the less government the better', the principle might be better summarized as 'no bigger than necessary, no smaller than appropriate'.

### The principle of human equality

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 a radical equality among all human beings. After all, as George Cladis [3] points out: "competition is alien within God." This principle lies close to the surface in every human being.

### The principle of common good

A community is genuinely healthy when all people, not only one or several segments, flourish. The Russian novelist Dostoevski put it this way: "The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons". "Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family." This concept of the common good seems to be 'fading away' in contemporary African public life, "not the utilitarian formula of the greatest good for the greatest number, but the moral formula of the greatest good for all", simply on the basis that they are human beings and therefore inherently worthy of respect.

## Theoretical Considerations

Among the traditions that under-girds Catholic social teaching is a philosophy the Church adopted from Stoicism. Known as the natural law tradition, this philosophy claims that people have access through reason to what is universal and eternally applicable natural law. St. Thomas Aquinas in the 12<sup>th</sup> century equated natural law with the divine law. He restored natural law to its independent state, asserting natural law as the rational creature's participation in the eternal law. Yet, since the human reason could not fully comprehend the eternal law it needed to be supplemented by eternal law. The natural law tradition is presumed to provide sufficient ethical guidance for all people, even apart from scripture Hollenback [4]. Hollenback points out that in emphasizing the congruity of Christian perspectives on justice with what can be expected from all people, as expected by natural law, the Church has methodically minimized conflicts about justice.

Based on the natural law tradition, other social economic paradigms emerge that influence Catholic social justice thought. One of the theories that the Church draws upon when it issues its social teaching is the organic social theory. It is a model of society and social theory that has been largely adopted from feudal social relations. This social theory has been called organic because of its tendency to see society as continuous with nature. The organic social model assumed by the Church values society that is hierarchically organized and stresses the values of paternal benevolence, social cooperation, and commitment to the common good. The organic social theory in the Roman Catholic sense frequently compares society to the human body. That is, as the organism of the body has priority over individual limbs, so the needs of the community have priority over the needs of individual members. Catholic organic theory places emphasis on the temporal welfare of the community as a whole, as well as the dominance of the spiritual over the temporal Baum [5]. Imbued with communitarian and cooperative values, the Church's social model is in many respects in conflict with modern liberal social theory.

Liberal or neoclassical theory promotes the free agency of autonomous individuals who seek their financial self-interest in a world presumed, if left on its own devices, to function in a rational and harmonious way Canterbury [6]. Liberal theory also assumes that social, economic and political structures function autonomously and that social and political structures can discipline economic power. This liberal theory has become the orthodox social theory on which western capitalism is based. True to the assumptions of the organic social model, Catholic papal and Episcopal teaching opposes some of the central tenets of economic liberalism that today inform much of the world economies.

The Church through various encyclicals has spoken out against the beliefs that individuals should always be free to pursue their own self-interest in the market place, and that markets should always be free from state interference, and that the role of the market is to be the unguided agency for the production and distribution of goods. The Church has also spoken out against orthodox assumption that economic, political and other social structures are autonomous entities Hobgood [1]. This critique of economic liberalism emanates in part from the organic social theory, which mandates the right of every person to the conditions necessary to live a dignified human life, and the responsibility of all persons to the common good of the community that natures and sustains them.

Nevertheless, despite its rejection of some of the tenets of orthodox social theory, Catholic teaching on economic matters often has affirmed

moral acceptability of the capitalist system and the assumptions of economic liberalism. This may be due, at least in part, to the fact that capitalism generates social economic hierarchies in both economy and the family, and thus is congenial to the organic social model assumed by the Church Hobgood [1].

The radical theory can be understood as affirming and extending, but also critiquing, various aspects of the organic theory. Like organic social theory, radical theory affirms that there are specific shared goods that make concrete the notion of the common good. But radical theory extends organic theory critique of economic liberalism by applying democracy to the arena of the social production of wealth. Radical theory also applies the principal of democratic participation and accountability to all spheres of social power and critiques the hierarchical social arrangements of organic theory especially with regard to such spheres as Church and family Hobgood [1]. Radical theorists conclude that long term qualitative change is impossible within the capitalist framework and the fundamental structural change, not reform leaving basic institutions intact-is necessary.

Radical theory therefore argues that these capitalist institutions are structurally interrelated and on cannot act effectively against one of them without in cooperating efforts to address all the others Hobgood [1]. These three very different social models – organic, liberal and radical are found in the encyclicals on Catholic teaching on modern capitalism, of which human work is a major component.

Thus the Catholic Church exhibits a divided mind when addressing twentieth-century economic realities. Competing assumptions from organic social model, as well as conflicts between its institutional needs and pastoral obligations, have split the Church's loyalties between liberal and radical perspectives and their seemingly contradictory interpretations of capitalist political economy.

By using a structural analysis, the leadership has at times demonstrated that the interlocking processes of capitalist political, social and economic institutions preclude the nurturing of the common good, a major organic value. But the Church has also clung to a value emanating from organic theory that supports the orthodox model, namely, that capitalist social hierarchies are necessary and essentially benevolent. Additionally the Church often has accepted the non-structural analysis of the liberal theory that assumes the autonomy of political and economic systems. In this regard, Hobgood [1] points out that the result is a mix of structural analysis of the political economy followed by non-structural policy prescription.

## Methodology

This paper is largely descriptive and exploratory as seen by Creswell [7], Babbie [8] as well as Bogdan [9]. The paper has used available literature related to Catholic Social Justice Teachings as well African Philosophical critique of the teachings to generate and analyze required data and to make generalizations about the subject matter. Library and internet searches provided the bulk of the information for the paper. The documentary sources used included published books, journal articles, magazines as well as unpublished materials such as dissertations, conference and seminar proceedings. These documentary sources provided the relevant information on the topic. In particular they were useful in demonstrating the need to appropriately contextualize papal teachings within the African reality.

## African Philosophy

There is a common belief among western scholars that philosophy

originates with the Greeks. The idea is so common that almost all of the books on philosophy start with the Greeks as if the Greeks predated all other people when it came to discussion of concepts of beauty, art, numbers, sculpture, medicine of social organization. In fact, this dogma occupies the principal position in the academies of the Western world, including the universities and academies of Africa.

It goes something like this:

- a) Philosophy is the highest discipline.
- b) All other disciplines are derived from philosophy.
- c) Philosophy is the creation of the Greeks.
- d) The Greeks are white; therefore whites are the creators of philosophy.

In the view of this dogma, other people and cultures may contribute thoughts, like the Chinese, Confucius, but thoughts are not philosophy; only the Greeks can contribute philosophy. The African people may have religion and myths, but not philosophy, according to this reasoning. Thus, this notion privileges the Greeks as the originators of philosophy, the highest of the sciences. African philosophy is not so much an area or topic within philosophy as it is a set of culturally original questions about the full range of philosophical issues. African philosophy deals with metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, as well as with the problems and opportunities of intercultural philosophizing, and does so in ways that cover the gamut of the analytic/continental divide in Western philosophy.

Questions about African philosophy's existence by non-Africans have often amounted to an implicit dismissal of Africa, as those questions come with the presumption that there is no philosophy in Africa, and the onus is on those who claim there is to prove it. Philosophy assumes man to be a rational agent who can distinguish between that which is good and bad, useful or otherwise.

Therefore the pre-occupation of African philosophers in African philosophy must be relevant to the improvement of the Africans in their worldly outlook. In this regard, African philosophy is an attempt by philosophers to make the folklores, myth, sooth sayings, religion, education, socio political organizations and other aspects of the African culture relevant to African needs not through any dogmatic attachment to standards used in evaluating the African culture or African culture itself, but through creative critical examination and logical methodologies which are not peculiar to the Western culture.

Henry Odera Oruka [10] distinguishes what he calls four trends in African philosophy: ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalistic-ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy.

### Ethnophilosophy

Ethnophilosophy involves the recording of the beliefs found in African cultures. Such an approach treats African philosophy as consisting in a set of shared beliefs, a shared worldview- an item of communal property rather than an activity for the individual.

### Philosophic sagacity

Philosophic sagacity is a sort of individualist version of ethnophilosophy, in which one records the beliefs of certain special members of a community. The premise here is that, although most societies demand some degree of conformity of belief and behavior from their members, a certain few of those members reach a particularly high level of knowledge and understanding of their cultures' world-

view; such people are sages. In some cases, the sage goes beyond mere knowledge and understanding to reflection and questioning -- these become the targets of philosophic sagacity.

### Professional philosophy

Professional philosophy is the view that philosophy is a particular way of thinking, reflecting, and reasoning, that such a way is relatively new to (most of) Africa, and that African philosophy must grow in terms of the philosophical work carried out by Africans and applied to (perhaps not exclusively) African concerns. This sort of view would be the intuitive answer of most Western philosophers (whether of continental or analytic persuasion) to the question 'what is African philosophy?'

### Nationalist-ideological philosophy

Nationalist-ideological philosophy might be seen as a special case of philosophic sagacity, in which not sages but ideologues are the subjects. Alternatively, we might see it as a case of professional political philosophy. In either case, the same sort of problem arises: we have to retain a distinction between ideology and philosophy, between sets of ideas and a special way of reasoning.

While it is a fact that cultural isolation is not possible in contemporary world and it is also true that cross-cultural interdependence and mutual borrowings cannot be over-emphasized, we should use African philosophy to create a fertile ground for cross-cultural pollination of ideas between the Africans and people of other races. Except for argument sake, any philosophy that does not recognize the importance of cross cultural interaction, for instance, the impact of science and technology, in contemporary times, is nothing but a waste of time, a mere hair splitting exercise, because whether we like it or not, whatever affects any part of the world will necessarily affect us in Africa, directly or indirectly either positively or negatively. Hence, we cannot afford to waste time. Our philosophy and indeed African philosophy can only be made relevant to the needs of our time only through speculative construction and critical examination of the ideas that govern our existence as Africans Oyeshile [11].

### Philosophical Considerations of Ubuntu and Communalism as Responses to Catholic Social Justice Teachings Principles

Having examined what African Philosophy embodies as seen in Oruka's trends in African philosophy, recent discussions on Ubuntu and Communalism as constituting African Philosophy are worth picking out as possible responses in the quest contextualizing and making relevant the Catholic Social Justice Principles within the African milieu. The concepts of *ubuntu* and *communalism* is of great importance in an African philosophical discourse. *Ubuntu* is a philosophy that promotes the common good of society and includes humanness as an essential element of human growth. In African culture the community always comes first. The individual is born out of and in to the community, therefore will always be part of the community. Interdependence, communalism sensitivity towards others and caring for others are all aspects of *ubuntu* as a philosophy of life Venter [12]. Broodryk [13] defines 'ubuntu' as a comprehensive ancient African worldview based on the values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values. Similarly, Letseka [14] argues that *ubuntu* has normative implications in that it encapsulates moral norms and values such as 'altruism, kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, and respect and concern for



others'. The concept was popularized in terms of a "philosophy" or "world view" (as opposed to a quality attributed to an individual) beginning in the 1950s.

Amongst Southern African communities, *ubuntu* is associated with the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which, loosely translated into English, means that to be a human being is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them Ramose [15], Ramphele [16]. Sindane [17] underscores the point that, *ubuntu* inspires us to expose ourselves to others, to encounter the difference of their humanness so as to inform and enrich our own'. Letseka [14] argues that the concept of *ubuntu* illuminates the communal embeddedness and connectedness of a person to other persons and highlights the importance attached to people and to human relationships.

In his recent groundbreaking work *Let Africa Lead*, Khoza [18] defines *Ubuntu* as "an African value system that means humanness or being human, a worldview characterized by such values as caring, sharing, compassion, communalism, communocracy and related predispositions". Khoza [18] adds that "Although it *Ubuntu* is culturally African in origin, the philosophy can have universal application". The collective consciousness advocated by *Ubuntu* thinkers involves notions such as universal brotherhood and sharing which for Mbigi means "participation". From this view Mbigi [19] develops a network of concepts such as "group solidarity", "compassion", "respect", "dignity", and "collective unity" to convey his idea of *Ubuntu*.

The *community spirit* in African theory and practice is philosophically concentrated in notions such as *ubuntu* and communalism. Communal interdependence is premised on the existence and flourishing of the extended family. In traditional African life, an individual lives in or is part of a family; that is, part of an extended family Mbiti [20] Ayisi [21] contends that the extended family 'forms the *raison d'être* of all social co-operation and responsibility. It acts as a social security for the members of the group'. For Mbiti [20], the extended family is a microcosm of the wider society. It presupposes a broad spectrum of associations including children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces and other distant relatives. Gyekye [22] concurs: one outstanding cultural value of the traditional African society that is a feature of ever-present consciousness of ties of kinship is the emphasis on the importance of the family – the extended family.

In some societies, it is normal for children to be sent to live with relatives for months or even years as part of these families. Mbiti [23], Venter [12] argues that communalism is an awareness of the fundamental interdependence of people, whereby duty to one's social group is more important than individual rights and privileges. Letseka [14] emphasizes that belonging to a community constitutes the very fabric of African life. In this respect, African philosophy should: Speculate about the communality of the individual in the African setting. It should provide conceptual frameworks for interpreting and analyzing the humaneness that both and *ubuntu* capture. It should provide rational tools for critical reflections on personal well-being or human flourishing, on communal ethics and how these ought to impact on human conduct Letseka [14].

### The responses of ubuntu and communalism to the catholic social justice principles

The collective consciousness advocated by *Ubuntu* thinkers involves notions such as universal brotherhood and sharing which for Mbigi means "participation". From this view Mbigi [19] develops a network

of concepts such as "group solidarity", "compassion", "respect", "dignity", and "collective unity" to convey his idea of *Ubuntu*. This has been stated clearly in Khoza's [18] view of "collective consciousness", which involves universal brotherhood, sharing and treating other people with respect. The sharing characteristic is very important for most Ubuntu philosophers – an attribute, which is also Mbigi's starting point in developing his views on Ubuntu. Roux and Coetzee [24] assert that Mbigi [19] bases his model on four principles which he derives from the Ubuntu view of life and which reflect and respond to elements of Catholic Social Justice Teachings as follows:

**Morality:** Which involves trust and credibility should be examined in view of what the Church calls "option for the poor". A basic moral test of society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. The poor have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of the nation. The option for the poor is a perspective that examines personal decisions, policies of private and public institutions, and economic relationships in terms of their effects on the poor - those who lack the minimum necessities of nutrition, housing, education, and health care. Those who are marginalized and whose rights are denied have privileged claims if society is to provide justice for all. The obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless arises from the radical command to love one's neighbor as one's self. The option for the poor is an essential part of society's effort to achieve the common good. A healthy community can be achieved only if its members give special attention to those with special needs, to those who are poor and on the margins of society.

**Interdependence:** This concerns the sharing and caring aspect that is co-operation and participation. The Catholic Church teaches that the human person is both sacred and social. We realize our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. As Saint Paul said, "We are one body: when one suffers, we all suffer." We are called to respect all of God's gifts of creation, to be good stewards of the earth and each other. In a culture driven by excessive individualism, our tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. Human dignity can only be realized and protected in the context of relationships with the wider society. How we organize our society - in economics and politics, in law and policy -- directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. The obligation to "love our neighbor" has an individual dimension, but it also requires a broader social commitment. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole society, to the common good.

**Spirit of man:** Which refers to human dignity and mutual respect that insists that human activity should be person driven and humanness should be central. The catholic social Justice principles assert that all people is sacred, made in the image and likeness of God. People do not lose dignity because of disability, poverty, age, lack of success, or race. The emphasis is on people over things, being over having, Belief in the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all Catholic social teaching. Human life is sacred, and the dignity of the human person is the starting point for a moral vision for society. The principle of human dignity is grounded in the idea that the person is made in the image of God. The person is the clearest reflection of God among humanity and lastly;

**Totality:** This pertains to continuous improvement of everything by every member. The Church teachers that people have a right, indeed a duty to participate in shaping a more just and human society, seeking together the common well and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. "All people need to take an active role in the development

of socio-economic, political and cultural life. They should be shapers of history (subjects), not just passive recipients of other people's decisions (objects). Catholic tradition insists that humanity should show respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. The goods of the earth are gifts from God, intended for the benefit of all. Humans are not the ultimate owners of these goods, but rather, the temporary stewards. They are entrusted with the responsibility of caring for these gifts and preserving them for future generations.

In the context of the African spirit of Ubuntu, Khoza [18] observes that Ubuntu "constitutes the spiritual cradle of African religion and culture and finds expression in virtually all walks of life— social, political and economic." In this sense, the African spirit of Ubuntu should then be regarded as one of the origins of the development of a human rights culture in the rest African continent. The Catholic Social Justice Principle regarding the dignity of workers is a case in mind; it states that the economy must serve people, not the other way around. All workers have a right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, and to safe working conditions. They also have a fundamental right to organize and join unions. People have a right to economic initiative and private property, but these rights have limits. No one is allowed to amass excessive wealth when others lack the basic necessities of life. The philosophy of Ubuntu spouses a fundamental respect in the rights of others, as well as a deep allegiance to the collective identity. More importantly, Ubuntu regulates the exercise of individual rights by emphasizing sharing and co-responsibility and the mutual enjoyment of rights by all. It also promotes good human relationships and enhances human value, trust and dignity.

The most outstanding positive impact of Ubuntu on the community is the value it puts on life and human dignity, particularly its caring attitude towards the elderly, who played and continue to play an important communal role in consolidating Ubuntu values. African societies place a high value on human worth, but it was humanism that found expression in a communal context rather than individualism Teffo [25]. According to Mbiti, "Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual". Respect for each person's human dignity is the basic principle of Catholic Social Teaching. Human rights flow from human dignity as human persons. The right to life from conception to natural death is the basic human right, the condition for the exercise of all other human rights, such as the rights of the child to live in a united family and a moral environment, the right to food, clothing and shelter, as well as health care, education and truth, the right to work, the right to marry and have a family, free speech, the right to participate in society and government, and religious freedom. To a person's rights there correspond duties: the duty in oneself to become what God calls us to be, and the duty in others to acknowledge and respect these rights and of helping persons achieve the free and full exercise of their rights if they are deprived of them. The Vatican Council stated: "Whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons: all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed." (Vatican Council: *Gaudium et Spes* 27). Respect for human rights and dignity leads to social harmony and cohesion starting at the family and cultural community, circling out to the global community. By perceiving the individual as being in the centre of this greater whole, the philosophy of Ubuntu may perhaps be described as African humanism. Ubuntu therefore has been called African humanism because it emphasizes the value of human dignity

irrespective of a person's usefulness. It expresses the idea that a person's life is meaningful only if he or she lives in harmony with other people because an African person is an integral part of society.

Khoza [18] describes communalism as "a concept that views humanity in terms of collective existence and inter subjectivity, serving as the basis for supportiveness, cooperation, collaboration and solidarity". In similar conceptual context, Gyekye [26] defines African communalism as a kinship-oriented social order, which is informed by an ethic of reciprocity. In a communal social order one is brought up with a sense of solidarity with large groups of people.

Pope John Paul stated: "God has created us to live in solidarity. This means to live in union with one another, supporting one another, committed to the common good, the good of all and each individual, because we are all responsible for all." (John Paul II: *Social Concerns of the Church* 38.4) Later in 2009, Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical; *Caritas in Veritate* or *Charity in Truth* states "Economic activity cannot prescind from gratuitousness, which fosters solidarity and responsibility for justice and the common good. Solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone". (Gratuitousness is giving without expecting a return). We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. Learning to practice the virtue of solidarity means learning that 'loving our neighbor' has global dimensions in an interdependent world.

As Pope John Paul II has said: Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. 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 really responsible for all." There is an intimate bond between solidarity and the common good, between solidarity and the universal sharing of goods, between solidarity and peace in the world. Pope John Paul's description of solidarity tells us what a family, parish, school or any organization should be like: the members supportive of one another, concerned for the needs and good of all. They will have a feeling of belonging together, of being "all for one, one for all". In the context of Gyekye's definition, this form of communalism signifies the human person as an inherently communal being embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, and never as an isolated, atomistic individual. In African community, people view themselves and what they do as equally good to others as to themselves.

## Conclusion

African Philosophical response to Catholic Social Justice Teaching principles is expressed in the concept of Ubuntu and Communalism and therefore the principals can be easily appreciated within the African community. Ubuntu is a philosophy that promotes the common good of society and includes humanness as an essential element of human growth. In African culture the community always comes first. The individual is born out of and in to the community, therefore will always be part of the community. The community spirit in African theory and practice is philosophically concentrated in notions such as ubuntu and communalism. Mbiti [20] contends that Communal interdependence is premised on the existence and flourishing of the extended family. In traditional African life, an individual lives in or is part of a family; that is, part of an extended family. These concepts as articulated clearly resonate and accommodate the Catholic Social Justice Principles embodied in Morality, which involves trust and credibility should be examined in view of what the Church calls "option for the poor". A basic moral test of society is how it treats its most vulnerable members.

The poor have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of the nation. Interdependence, which concerns the sharing and caring aspect that is co-operation and participation. The Catholic Church teaches that the human person is both sacred and social. We realize our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. The spirit of man, which refers to human dignity and mutual respect that insists that human activity should be person driven and humanness should be central. The catholic social Justice principles assert that all people is sacred, made in the image and likeness of God and Totality which pertains to continuous improvement of everything by every member. Africa's instruction strategies put forth an in number defense for the advancement of basic thinking in classroom educating; yet, expansive quantities of educators in the framework are not prepared to advance discriminating speculation aptitudes. The scientists prescribe the presentation of short courses on basic speculation and African logic as in-administration preparing for instructors. In higher education, African philosophy is mulled over as a component of Philosophy of Education. Be that as it may, this appears to be lacking to impart completely the qualities which the Department of Education needs actualized in training. The investigation of African reasoning ought to empower understudies to grasp the philosophical values and place them into practice. From one perspective Africa's constitution reverts an extensive variety of rights and flexibilities for citizens and certifies the law based estimations of balance and human pride. The Church teaches that people have a right, indeed a duty to participate in shaping a more just and human society, seeking together the common well and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

#### References

- Hobgood ME (1991) Catholic social teaching and economic theory: Paradigms in Conflict. Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
- Kenneth H (2001) Responses to 101 questions on social catholic teaching Manwah, Paulist Press: 30.
- Cladis G (1999) Leading the team-based church San Francisco. Jossey-Bass
- Hollenback D (1994) Catholicism and liberation: Contributions to American public philosophy. Cambridge, New York.
- Baum G, Christopher L (1984) Ethics and economics: Canada's Catholic bishops and the economic crisis. Toronto: Lorimar.
- Canterbery E (1980) The making of economics (2ndedn) Belmont. Wadsworth, Calif.
- Creswell JW (1998) Qualitative inquiry and research design-choosing among the five traditions. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, CA.
- Babbie E (2001) The Practice of social research. New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Bogdan R, Bilken KS (2003) Qualitative research for education: An Introduction to theory and methods (4thedn.) MA: Allyn and Bacon, Boston.
- Oruka HO (2002) Four trends in current African philosophy in Coetzee PH and Roux APJ (eds.) Philosophy from Africa (2ndedn). Oxford University Press, Cape Town: 120-124.
- Olatunji OA (2008) On defining African philosophy: History, challenges and perspectives. Humanity and Social Sciences Journal 3: 57-64
- Venter E (2004) The notion of ubuntu and communalism in African educational discourse. Studies in Philosophy and Education 23: 149-160.
- Broodryk J (2002) Ubuntu: Life lessons from Africa. Ubuntu School of Philosophy, Pretoria.
- Letseka M (2000) African philosophy and educational discourse in Higgs P, Vakalisa NCG, Mda TV and NT Assie-Lumumba (eds.). African voices in education, Juta, Landsdowne 179-193.
- Ramose MB (2002) The philosophy of ubuntu and ubuntu as a philosophy in P.H. Coetzee and Roux A.P.J. (eds.) Philosophy from Africa (2ndedn). Oxford University Press, Cape Town 230-238.
- Ramphela M (2001) Citizenship challenges for South Africa's young democracy. Journal of American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Daedalus 130:1-17.
- Sindane J (1994) Ubuntu and nation building. Ubuntu School of Philosophy, Pretoria
- Khoza RJ (2005) Let Africa lead. Sunning hill: Vezubuntu.
- Mbigi L (1997) Ubuntu-The dream in African management. Knowledge Resources, Randburg.
- Mbiti JS (1975) Introduction to African religion. Heinemann, London.
- Ayisi EO (1992) An introduction to the study of African culture. East African Education Publishers, Nairobi.
- Gyeke K (1997) Tradition and modernity: Philosophical reflections on the African experience, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Mbiti JS (1969) African religions and philosophy. Doubleday, New York.
- Roux APJ, Coetzee PH (1994) Beyond the question of African philosophy: A selection of papers presented at the International colloquia, Unisa, Philosophy, African 304-318.
- Teffo LJ (1998) Both/ubuntu as a way forward for contemporary South Africa. Word and Action 38: 3-5.
- Gyeke K (1987) An essay on African philosophical thought-The Akan conceptual scheme. Cambridge University Press, New York.

Citation: Kizito O, Juma F (2015) Catholic Social Justice Principles: An African Philosophical Response. Arts Social Sci J 6: 107. doi:[10.4172/2151-6200.1000107](https://doi.org/10.4172/2151-6200.1000107)