

## **Living Positively with Roman Catholic Teaching and Transmitting the Truth about HIV/AIDS**

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### **CAFOD's response to HIV/AIDS**

As an outsider looking in, it seems to me that CAFOD can be extremely proud of its work on HIV/AIDS. Over the last two decades, CAFOD has played a leading role in Faith-based responses to the pandemic. It has put HIV firmly on the agenda of Caritas Internationalis. It has empowered numerous partner organisations in their responses to the effects of the disease.

It also had the vision and courage to undertake the risky but necessary task of alerting Catholic bishops, clergy and theologians to the nature of the pandemic and its development consequences, thereby educating and enlisting the vital support of different sectors of the Church that could offer other much-needed resources in the fight against the pandemic and the many misunderstandings that surround it.

I benefited from one of the theological consultations in Dublin in 1994 (like they say – there is no such thing as a free lunch!). CAFOD's response involves integrating the best of Catholic social teaching with the best weapons for fighting the pandemic. What is needed is a combination therapy: combining theological vision, moral sensitivity and pastoral strategy.

This distinctive combination therapy approach underpins the excellent paper: 'HIV Prevention from the Perspective of a Faith-Based Development Agency' that the HIV Section of CAFOD presented to the 15<sup>th</sup> International AIDS Conference in Bangkok in July 2004. It is this combination therapy approach that inspires Christian responses to the pandemic, that allows us to live positively with Roman Catholic teaching and that allows us to transmit the truth about HIV/AIDS. It is the Church's theological vision that I wish to concentrate on today in what I am going to call a liberation theology approach to HIV/AIDS.

### **Living positively with the Bible**

(with the help of my moral theologian colleagues Jan Jans and Kevin Kelly)

The Bible is the chief inspirational resource that Christians draw upon. The starting point for understanding humane living (Christian morality) is the dialogical relationship between humankind and God – especially as God has been revealed in the person of

Jesus Christ. God has revealed love for us – something that is captured in the OT stories of God’s covenant with the people of Israel who were brought out of bondage in Egypt.

God’s love continues to be revealed in the incarnation, through Jesus’ words and actions. The natural thing for humans to do who understand the world and its creatures as something created and loved by God, enveloped in this relationship, is to respond to this loving initiative in kind: we profess our faith in the way we live our lives.

In the Old Testament, two books of the Pentateuch carry a summary of what this means in practice: ‘Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.’ (Deuteronomy 6: 4-5). And ‘... you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord.’ (Leviticus 19: 18).

In the New Testament as a response to a Pharisee’s request for the greatest commandment in the Law Jesus identifies the Deuteronomy command. The second is the Leviticus command to love neighbour as self. These two commands are singled out by Jesus as the greatest commands through which all other laws must be understood and interpreted: ‘On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.’ (Mt 22: 38-40).

In other words, Jesus pointed to the two chief ways that we can make this response: through love of God and love of neighbour. This is what life in Christ involves. It must honour God and serve persons. The earliest Christians found this a crucial teaching of Jesus and it is repeated throughout the Gospels and in Paul. In other words, we are misunderstanding the practical implications of the Gospel if we interpret it to demand behaviour that is dehumanizing and violates the good of human persons.

In terms of moral wisdom, one of the classic texts is that of the Decalogue. The ten commandments can be considered paradigmatic summaries of the humane response to God’s initiative, for they are set in the liberative context of God delivering the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. The biblical texts that contain the Decalogue capture the dynamic relationship (or covenant) of God’s response to the lamentations of the oppressed by freeing them from captivity, and humankind’s response of justice in human relations.

The Decalogue can be found in Exodus 20: 2-17 and Deuteronomy 5: 6-21. These actual texts from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible are appended at the end of this section so that you can compare them. This is because the later Deuteronomy version differs slightly from the earlier Exodus version.

Jan Jans (in his forthcoming article in *Concilium*) has some interesting observations to make about how these texts differ. For example, the later Deuteronomy no longer views the neighbour’s wife as mere property but as having a status prior to the listing of household possessions. By not coveting one’s neighbour’s wife one pays proper respect not solely to the neighbour but to the wife too. She becomes if not a person of equal

dignity with the male, at least something other than male property and something other than an object of the (male) gaze.

In both the Decalogue accounts there are strong commands to keep the Sabbath. In Exodus this is justified on the basis of God's mammoth work of creation: that the Lord created the world in six days and rested on the seventh and therefore blessed and made holy the Sabbath. As people made in God's image and likeness, this patterning on the basis of God's actions pays respect to the Lord.

In Deuteronomy the passage differs and the same command is justified on a different basis. A concern for the human person is inserted into the text. This time the concern is for the manservant and maidservant. All must rest, including the traveller, in order to ensure that the servants are allowed their day off too. And the justification? Remember that you too were once a servant, in bondage in Egypt. This is a sort of appeal to the golden rule: do unto others as you would have done unto you. Remember also that the Lord God delivered you from this servile state. All the more reason to keep the command.

In Deuteronomy one sees the emergence of the view that obedience to God's law is not about obedience for obedience's sake. Commands that appear arbitrary or disconnected from the wellbeing of persons are given an added humanistic dimension by the insertion of concern for the lowly: the woman and the servant.

But, as Jan Jans indicates, more can be said about the commandment about Sabbath observance. All four Gospels carry accounts of Jesus disregarding the Sabbath law for some compelling reason.

In Mark (2:23-28) it arises from Jesus' disciples plucking and eating heads of grain as they walked through the fields on the Sabbath. Jesus defends them to the Pharisees replying that David also broke the Sabbath to eat the temple bread when he and his friends were hungry. 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath' he says. As Jesus enters the synagogue (3:1-6) the Pharisees follow him and wonder whether he will attempt to heal the man with a withered hand. Before Jesus heals him, he asks the Pharisees angrily whether it is lawful to do good or evil on the Sabbath, whether one should save life or kill? In Matthew (12: 1-13) the story is the same except Jesus cites Hosea 6:6: 'I desire mercy not sacrifice'. In Luke 6:1-6 these events are repeated. Later in chapter 13 of Luke he heals a woman bent over - to the anger of the Pharisees - and in chapter 14 in the house of a Pharisee he asks them whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath before curing the man with dropsy. A similar healing story, of the man born blind is in John chapter 9.

Jesus' examples illustrate that laws should serve persons, rather than simply uphold ideals. In the concrete situations in which people find themselves, the values that lie within the ruling must be teased out and promoted as best as possible. In the case of the Sabbath law it achieves a dual purpose. It pays homage to the Lord God who has done great things for the people. It also guarantees a day of rest that is genuinely healing and

good for persons. But proper reverence for the Sabbath does not include actions that let humans or animals suffer. According to Jesus it is right and proper to water your cattle or pull them from danger on the Sabbath.

### **The Decalogue as mediations of love of God and neighbour**

The Decalogue can only be properly understood as mediations of love of God and neighbour: as attempts to spell out what love of God and neighbour means in practice. This was appreciated at the time that the Catechism of the Catholic Church was compiled. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church the section on morality is therefore divided up into two chief sections: the first chapter is based on love of God (commandments 1-3), the second chapter on love of neighbour (commandments 4-10).

Of course, a list of commands can seem overly negative and demoralizing compared with a list of positive precepts. For this reason, moral theologian, Kevin Kelly, at the time the Catechism of the Catholic Church was published in 1994, wrote out the ten commandments in terms of ten positive values as a means of countering the negative effects of a list of 'do not's'. These are listed in his book *From A Parish Base*, and I have included them at the end of the paper here to indicate how they offer a much more open and creative way of expressing the human response to love of God and neighbour.

### **A liberation theology approach to HIV/AIDS**

There is a strong liberation dimension to Christianity. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry he announces his life's project in the synagogue in Nazareth: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' (Luke 4: 18-19). In this speech, Luke has Jesus quoting from the prophet Isaiah (Is. 61: 1-2). Indeed the whole of Jesus' ministry can be viewed as one of liberating people from sin, healing the sick and repairing brokenness. It is given classical expression in Matthew's sermon on the mount and Luke's sermon on the plain. It is clear that the priorities of the reign of God are the concerns of the sick and hungry before the comfortable and wealthy.

The Old Testament is also pervaded by this theme of liberation: not just in Isaiah. The exodus story of God's deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt forms the backdrop to the ten commandments and is constantly invoked in Deuteronomy as a means of reminding the Hebrew people of their duties of concern for the weak. At the same time, the Genesis story of humankind's fall from grace illustrates the shadow side of the human desire for freedom, establishing the inherent abuse of humankind's gift of freedom. There is a grace-resistant dimension to the human condition. We lack holiness. These two strands – humankind's need for liberation and its tendency to abuse freedom were treated at Vatican II in the landmark 1965 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (also known by its Latin title *Gaudium et spes*).

*Gaudium et spes* (among many other things) describes humankind’s abuse of freedom from the beginning of history, the heart’s inclination to wrongdoing, the disordered state of human relations, and the inability to liberate oneself from this state without divine help. However, it is not just individual sin that the document acknowledges. The social character of sin is acknowledged too. Humans are born into and conditioned by their sinful surrounds. There is systemic and structural injustice, political and economic corruption that distorts human relations. Sin is a condition or state rather than mere act, in which the whole social fabric is infected. To that extent, we are all sinners, but at the same time we are also all victims of sin too.

To renew our relationship with our creator God and become truly free we – who are all living in sin -are called to *metanoia* - conversion of heart and life. At the same time *Gaudium et spes* powerfully establishes God’s relationship with humanity in terms of a hope-inspiring covenant relationship of enduring love (rather than as distant law-giver and judge) that calls people to humanize their world.

Since Vatican II there has been a major shift in theological perspective towards a more liberating approach that has recovered a sense of the good news of the Gospel. Theology has come to be seen as not just a search for the truth, but a truth that will make people free. It has a liberation dimension because it is aimed at understanding what is good for human persons.

Previously Catholic theology, rather than affirming persons, could seem impoverished, scholastic and life-denying. Catholic theology pre-Vatican II seemed to glide high over human affairs, missing the contextual features of the landscape below and it therefore appeared to be something that could be divorced from ordinary Catholic lives in all their diversity and complexity.

**A life-denying theology...**

God as judge

Moral living = dos and don’ts

Goodness = obedience to rules

The Church is a hierarchy

**A life-denying theology...**

God as encourager and enabler

Moral living = being and becoming

Goodness = Embodying values and virtues

The Church is a discipleship of equals

When theologians applied the insights of *Gaudium et spes* to the local Church context in Latin America with its conditions of poverty and injustice it gave rise to what became known as ‘liberation theology’ which quickly spread to other oppressed groups who applied the same fundamental principles to their own situation of marginalization and communal struggle for justice, giving rise to black theology, Asian liberation theology, feminist theology and gay theology. Without doubt, liberation approaches have been the most influential theologies since Vatican II.

## Key aspects of liberation theology

The key elements of liberation theology seek to make sense of the 2 approaches to freedom already outlined in *Gaudium et spes*. Firstly, humankind's propensity to abuse its gift of freedom and shirk its responsibility. Secondly, humanity's resultant need for liberation from this network of sin through God's loving initiative.

Liberation theology is concerned with the *humanum* and transformation of **this** world as a means of bringing about the Kingdom of God (rather than see it as something that can be deferred until the next life). The growth of the Kingdom of God takes place in human history through liberation in all its forms. God's action in history (especially through Christ) has been to bring liberation to the oppressed. Social analysis of the human situation allows the many instances of injustice to be recognised, acknowledged and understood. This in turn leads to an awakening or conscientisation which leads to a prioritising on the basis of those most in need (the preferential option for the poor) and a siding with the marginalised, disenfranchised, alienated and oppressed in an expression of solidarity – as the biblical witness so strongly attests.

## The strengths of liberation theology

Liberation theology is successful because it shows that the Gospel message has the power to transform people's lives and mobilize work for justice and liberation. It incarnates the best theology of Vatican II. It responds meaningfully in a practical and theological way to the universal problem of unjust and avoidable human suffering. It combines Scripture, doctrinal theology and the social teachings of the Church in ways not previously achieved.

Prior to Vatican II, social teachings were largely premised on the insights of philosophy and human reason rather than the Bible and theology: on Catholic interpretations of natural law. Liberation theology is therefore a theologically rich way of presenting the Christian vision of the world. And it is prophetic – it has uncomfortable words for comfortable Christians about our shared responsibility and lack of concern for the needy.

Liberation theology has subsequently been re-appropriated by the Vatican in its social teaching in the writings of John Paul and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The margins have changed the centre. The focus of Catholic Social Teaching has shifted from its 19<sup>th</sup> century concern over the economic conditions of the poor in the industrial revolution in the West to the conditions of those in the Southern hemisphere. Few can deny the powerful advocacy for the poor and oppressed by the Catholic Church and its action for a more humane society that has built on the Catholic social tradition since the so-called Worker's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and combined it with a more keen biblical witness (especially in the writings of John Paul II) and firmer Gospel foundations.

## Liberation theology in the context of HIV/AIDS

When applied to the devastating consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic a liberation theology approach attempts to incarnate a Gospel response confident that Jesus, in his life and ministry, was closest not to the morally upright but to those whose lives were in collapse. Liberation theology approaches to HIV analyse the unjust structures that are at play in the spread of the pandemic and turn to the liberating good news of the Gospel to address these sinful causes, to provide care and advocacy and to empower those laid low by its impact. The process of liberation is at three interrelated levels:

- Liberation in the political, social, cultural and economic sphere, to deliver people from those factors that increase vulnerability to infection. For those familiar with the model employed by Enda McDonagh and Ann Smith in the excellent *The Reality of HIV/AIDS*, this corresponds to the shallow and deep roots of the HIV problem tree.
- Personal liberation in which those affected and infected by the disease rediscover and maintain their dignity and self-belief in the face of the disease and in the face of discrimination and stigma.
- Liberation from sin. This is surely the most challenging behaviour change required, not least because there are powerful and often oppressive forces that reduce human freedom and that make change difficult, personally threatening and at times even impossible. Conversion (*metanoia*) in these circumstances cannot be anything other than incremental, show regression as well as advance, and occur only with the accompaniment of all the pastoral resources that a community and Church has at its disposal. It is inconceivable that Catholics affected by and infected with HIV should be prevented from drawing nourishment from the sacramental life of the Church at such a vital time.

A liberation theology approach can communicate God's undying love for each of us, God's immediate forgiveness of those who express sorrow and remorse for wrongdoing, and the hope and faith that death, suffering, illness, loss and failure are not the end. The Gospels end not in utter abjection with the scandal of the cross, but in new life and empowerment as the Spirit descends as promised spreading its healing wisdom far and wide. In this *kairos* time we must seize the opportunity rather than hide in fear.

The irruption of the poor that emerged in Latin America and other colonised lands is now also an irruption of those living with HIV, previously ignored or omitted from pastoral ministry. Absent, now present, revealing the wounds of Christ and the wounded Church. Afflicted but no longer silent. The unjust sufferings and hopes of those affected by and infected with the virus speak out to us and evangelise us – calling us back to the urgency of the Gospel message.

Only by denouncing the injustices of HIV will the Church offer a prophetic witness. Thus, alongside such work, a liberation theology approach to HIV will be engaged in conscientisation – educating those at risk and educating wider society to end the discrimination, stigma, and take up the challenge of responding to the pandemic.

**Liberation theology presupposes the liberation of theology.**

Despite the prophetic witness and untiring work of many Catholics committed to combating the pandemic, it is clear that some parts of the worldwide Catholic Church (composed of over 1 billion adherents) have not fully incarnated this liberative Vatican II vision.

On the ground, both clergy and lay people are living with medieval manifestations of Catholicism that are obstructing efforts to fight the pandemic. For example, notions that women are subordinate to males and should passively comply with or obey male authority, that disease is divine punishment for wrongdoing, or that innocent victims of exploitation are guilty of mortal sin and doomed to hell fire if they take measures to avoid infection. These horrific manifestations - while found within Catholicism - are simply not Catholic.

At the same time, some members of the Church laity and hierarchy have been blind to or even complicit with injustice on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation despite the fact that these are expressly counter to Catholic teaching. At the level of the Church as institution, the doers of theology and those who formulate theology in Church teachings are not infrequently operating out of an understanding of Church and world that is at odds with the Vatican II vision.

Furthermore, the Church's moral teachings and appeals to Scripture are being misapplied when they are proposed in ways that are harmful to persons. In other words, commandments are being invoked without the overarching interpretative framework of the dual love command (for God and neighbour) and without attention to Jesus' lived example (such as on Sabbath observance). Sadly, traditional institutional theology as it emerges from Rome can all too often speak a theological language that is more congenial to the superstition, ignorance, fear, blind obedience and monarchical authority of Catholic medievalism.

In the same way that the visual model of a problem tree can help to portray the causes and effects of the pandemic, a similar effort could be drawn up to show how certain ignorance, misapplication of Church teaching, misapplication of Scripture, pastoral insensitivity, fear of the magisterium and Bishops, bigotry and prejudice about Catholic teaching (some of which have deeper theological roots than others) are increasing vulnerability to infection and hampering development work. The effects of these distortions (the branches of the problem tree) are clear. New infections, more deaths, alienation from the Church, loss of Catholic credibility and so on.

The Catholic Church has a liberative theological vision that can ground pastoral and development responses to HIV/AIDS. The problem and challenge is making this good news of the Gospel known and sensitively countering the ignorance, prejudice and misunderstanding.

## Reading

Stuart C. Bate OMI (ed.), *Responsibility in a Time of AIDS: A Pastoral Response by Catholic Theologians and AIDS Activists in Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2003

James F. Keenan SJ (ed.), *Catholic Ethicists on HIV/AIDS Prevention*, New York: Continuum, 2000

Kevin T. Kelly, *New Directions In Sexual Ethics*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1998

Kevin T. Kelly, *From A Parish Base: Essays in Moral and Pastoral Theology*, London: DLT, 1999

Ann Smith & Enda McDonagh, *The Reality of HIV/AIDS*, Dublin: Veritas, 2003

**Exodus 20:2-17**

I am the Lord your God,  
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,  
out of the house of bondage.  
You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself a graven image,  
or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,  
or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water  
under the earth; you shall not bow down to them  
or serve them for I am a jealous God, visiting the  
iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third  
and the fourth generation of those who hate me,  
but showing steadfast love to thousands of those  
who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain;  
for the Lord will not hold him guiltless  
who takes his name in vain.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Six days you shall labour, and do all your work;  
but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God;  
in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son,  
or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant,  
or your cattle,  
or the sojourner who is within your gates;  
for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth,  
the sea, and all that is in them,  
and rested the seventh day; therefore  
the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Honour your father and your mother,  
that your days may be long  
in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

You shall not kill.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house;  
you shall not covet your neighbour's wife;  
or his manservant, or his maidservant,  
or his ox, or his ass,  
or anything that is your neighbour's.

**Deuteronomy 5: 6-21**

I am the Lord your God,  
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,  
out of the house of bondage.  
You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself a graven image,  
or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,  
or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water  
under the earth; you shall not bow down to them  
or serve them for I am a jealous God, visiting the  
iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third  
and the fourth generation of those who hate me,  
but showing steadfast love to thousands of those  
who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain;  
for the Lord will not hold him guiltless  
who takes his name in vain.

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,  
as the Lord your God commanded you.  
Six days you shall labour, and do all your work;  
but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God;  
in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son,  
or your daughter, or your manservant, or your maidservant,  
or your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle,  
or the sojourner who is within your gates,  
that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you.  
You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt,  
and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand  
and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God  
commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Honour your father and your mother,  
as the Lord your God commanded you;  
that your days may be prolonged,  
and that it may go well with you,  
in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

You shall not kill.

Neither shall you commit adultery.

Neither shall you steal.

Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbour.

Neither shall you covet your neighbour's wife;  
and you shall not desire your neighbour's house, his field,  
or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass,  
or anything that is your neighbour's.

**The Ten Commandments as mediations of love of God and neighbour**

[Kevin Kelly, *From A Parish Base: Essays in moral and pastoral theology*, London: DLT, 1999, pp. 141-143]

**YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD BY...**

1. Recognising your dignity as human persons, created in the image of God, loved by God and invited to respond to his love.

Value: The giftedness of the human person's ability to relate to God.

2. Respecting the sacredness of the gift of human language, enabling you to speak what is most deep and precious in life – the very mystery of God himself, as well as the deepest mysteries of the human person and the rest of God's creation.

Value: The giftedness of the human person's ability to know God.

3. Recognising that nothing in creation is more sacred to God than the human person and that, therefore, the sacredness of ritual and communion serve to fulfil a most fundamental need deep in the heart of each human person.

Value: The giftedness of the human person's ability to encounter God in ritual and communion.

**YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF BY...**

4. Recognising that you receive yourselves as a gift from your parents, a gift to be shared gratefully and lovingly with others – within your families and within society at large.

Value: The goodness of family and social relationships.

5. Respecting your giftedness and responsibility as embodied persons, endowed with life to be respected and health to be cared for.

Value: The goodness of life and health.

6. Respecting your giftedness and responsibility as sexual persons, endowed with the capacity for faithful and life-giving loving relationships.

Value: The goodness of human sexuality, enabling us to share life and love.

7. Respecting your giftedness and responsibility as social persons, bound together in interdependence on each other and on the rest of creation of which you are stewards.

Value: The goodness of living together in society, respectful of the integrity of the rest of God's creation.

8. Recognising and respecting the gifts of truth and beauty you are privileged to share and continuing the human quest for a deeper understanding of that truth and for a greater appreciation of beauty.

Value: The goodness of truth and beauty and the human pursuit of both.

9. & 10. Seeking to purify your hearts from the twin idols of lust and greed which divorce the human goods of physical attractiveness and material possessions from what gives them value, namely the dignity of the human person.

Value: The goodness (blessedness) of purity of heart.