

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. **John 10:10***

*Economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment. Here we see how environmental deterioration and human and ethical degradation are closely linked. **Laudato Si', par 56***

*The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed.... As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found.... The dignity of each person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies. **Evangelii Gaudium, par 202-203***

Economic Justice

Columban missionaries have recognized for decades that economic injustice is a barrier to the building of the Kingdom. Economic poverty is a form of violence against the dignity of the human person, and is inevitably linked to inequality. Economic prosperity for the few has meant more and deeper poverty for many. We see the results, especially in the lives of indigenous communities, women and children, farmers, low-paid workers, and migrants of this unfair distribution of economic security and access to quality life essentials. Our Society's Constitutions states, "We recognize the moral challenge of worldwide and local poverty, and allow this recognition to qualify all our thinking....It means supporting the struggle of the poor for real participation and against injustice". This recognition as central to our identity has shaped Columban missionary work for many years.

In our missionary work today, Columbans witness the hardships brought about by unjust global economic structures and policies. For many people, especially in the global South, poverty and exclusion from the global economy is a life or death matter. As missionaries, we are called to, "be a prophetic voice against all forms of injustice and serve as a link in the network of human alliances for the transformation and Christian liberation of peoples". Therefore, we believe the global economy should serve the poor and vulnerable, with care and respect for all of Creation such as stated in the Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church, "The principle of the universal destination of goods is an invitation to develop an economic vision inspired by moral values that permit people not to lose sight of the origin or purpose of these goods, so as to bring about a world of fairness and solidarity[.]

Columban Concerns

Global Trade and Investment Policies

Columban missionaries live and serve in many countries that have free trade agreements which include investment policies. We see how these agreements serve to disproportionately benefit a small number of individuals, governments, and corporations while leaving the majority of people struggling to live. We believe that the current economic model does not reflect the Gospel values of solidarity, justice, dignity and respect for all of Creation. Trade and investment agreements, that often lack transparency in the negotiation process, have human consequences, and must be evaluated with regard to the effects that they have on the poor and all of God's Creation. We see that such agreements favor the interests of transnational corporations and make it more difficult for governments to defend labor rights and protect the environment. As a result, these agreements and policies drive migration and exacerbate poverty by making it difficult to access dignified employment and essential services, such as clean water, adequate housing, education and basic health care.

Debt and Development

For decades countries in the Global South have been forced by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to accumulate and sustain unjust and burdensome debt, often times in the name of development. Often these debts were accrued under corrupt governments and military dictatorships. Policies such as privatization and austerity implemented through IFIs violate the economically poor while benefiting the wealthy. Predatory lending at both individual and governmental levels further pushes people and countries into poverty leaving them unable to provide basic human needs such as education, health care, and housing for families. In more recent years, the emergence of Vulture Funds is of grave concern as this pattern of debt gives power to private investment firms over economically poor countries to dictate conditions of debt repayment and sue governments when those conditions are not met. We believe that true development comes in the form of respecting the fullness of each person and all of Creation which is reflected in *Laudato Si'* when Pope Francis speaks of a "culture of overconsumption" and invites a new understanding development when he says,

But we need to grow in the conviction that a decrease in the pace of production and consumption can at times give rise to another form of progress and development. Efforts to promote a sustainable use of natural resources are not a waste of money, but rather an investment capable of providing other economic benefits in the medium term. If we look at the larger picture, we can see that more diversified and innovative forms of production which impact less on the environment can prove very profitable. It is a matter of openness to different possibilities which do not involve stifling human creativity and its ideals of progress, but rather directing that energy along new channels.

Poverty and Migration

The right to migrate is a basic human right in order to protect and provide for the well-being of oneself and one's family. Columban missionaries serve economically poor and marginalized communities globally, where interlinking social and environmental conditions drive people to migrate away from their homes in search of economic and human security. Food insecurity,

unemployment, low wages, and lack of dignified employment combined with the promise of employment opportunities in receiving nations are powerful incentives to migrate. Often global economic policies result in grave inequalities and oppressive working conditions causing people to leave home. We see how the unjust global economic system creates conditions of violence for refugees, migrants and their families, and victims of human trafficking.

Food and Agriculture

Food and food sovereignty – the right to decide on food policy, is a basic human right. However, the inclusion of agriculture in world trade agreements has vastly changed the way of life for hundreds of millions of people. This has had adverse effects on small farmers around the world, especially those in the global South. While farming is a way of life for many of the world's poor, trade in agriculture is dominated by multinational corporations that often control and distort the market. Most agricultural sectors are dominated by a few corporations and small farmers have little or no voice during trade negotiations and policy design. This diminishes their right to food sovereignty, market access, access to good livelihoods and rural development. Over two-thirds of women in the global South are employed in agriculture and so women are especially affected by unfair trade policies. The priorities of women are often ignored when policies are written.

Genetically Modified Organisms and Patenting

Many communities and countries have been affected by Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), which are of particular concern to Columbans. International Financial Institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank, and countries like the United States, have encouraged the use of genetically engineered crops, which are patented and owned by corporations. This practice of patenting does not allow farmers to save their seeds, a practice developed by small farmers for centuries. Farmers are further forced into debt by having to purchase new seeds each year, or to stop farming. Many of these genetically engineered crops actually use more pesticides and herbicides, some of which are linked to cancer, problems with fertility, and learning and developmental disabilities. Land traditionally used to grow food is now being used to grow GMO based-biofuel which we see is a false solution to energy dependency because not only do biofuels take away from healthy food production but most biofuel production emits an equal amount of greenhouse gases as traditional fossil fuels.

Environmental and Cultural Destruction

International trade and investment policies are usually designed to benefit corporations with high profits with little regard for the consequences and impacts on poor communities and the natural world. For example, extractive industries, a major component in free trade agreements, have inflicted lasting damage to communities and to Creation through the extraction of oil, gas and minerals. Large-scale mining, logging, and agribusiness have also harmed biodiversity, healthy eco-systems, farmable and ancestral lands, and cultural heritage. We are especially attentive to Pope Francis' invitation in *Laudato Si'* (49) "to integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*"

Growing Militarism

Militarism is promoted as necessary for defense, security and most nation states regard war as an acceptable tool of foreign policy. We see that war is both a military and economic venture. The expansion of military presence around the world and the arms industry erodes at the culture of

peace which Columbans work to cultivate. Billions of dollars are spent on the research and development of more deadly and sophisticated ways of killing people and destroying the environment, even moving into space. Economic realities contribute to and promote a culture of militarism from which many people benefit directly or indirectly.

Columban Response

Fair and Equitable Trade

Columban missionaries serve economically poor and marginalized communities, many of which have developed alternative forms of production through organic farming and sustainable development practices. In the Philippines, for example, several projects and organizations have been founded by Columbans which work for economic justice. The PREDA Fair Trade Project is one example that provides dignified work for women and children who have survived sex abuse and trafficking. Other examples include the Negros Nine Foundation and Subanen Crafts Project which provide meaningful work that celebrates and honors the cultural and spiritual traditions and practices of indigenous communities.

Similarly Columbans have worked to address education and health care needs of economically poor communities founding schools and health care clinics around the world. In many places, these schools and health clinics become places for inter-religious dialogue and peace-building as the centers are open to people of all faiths. For example, in Pakistan Columbans have founded health clinics and schools which serve the local community bringing together families of Muslim, Christian, and Hindu faiths who then build relationships that breakdown stereotypes and discrimination. In Peru, several centers have been founded by Columbans to care for children with special physical, mental, and emotional needs as well as a center for adults with HIV/AIDS. In Myanmar, Columban Sisters developed a home care health program for people with HIV/AIDS and established The Hope Centre, a respite house to enable people from distant places to avail medical care.

Education and Advocacy for change

We are committed to working for structural change as part of an integrated strategy for addressing the root causes of violence, economic and environmental injustice. We see the structural causes of and systematic impact that policies of war, free trade, environmental over-consumption have on communities and the natural world. Columban Mission Centers around the world are involved in challenging governments which promote policies that create economic, social, and environmental violence. For example, for years Columbans opposed the international free trade agreement known as the Transpacific Partnership (TTP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) on the basis that both agreements lacked transparency in the negotiating process and serve corporate interests while ignoring the needs and voices of the people and all of Creation.

Debt Cancellation

Columban missionaries played a significant role in early international economic justice campaigns that began with the global call for debt cancellation in the 1980's. The international Jubilee network was founded in part by Columbans in both the global South and North. Though many advancements have been made in achieving debt reduction and cancellation, Columbans

still see today how governments are tied to the repayment of unjust debts from decades ago. Therefore we continue to call for full debt cancellation of poor countries. Similarly, we reject policies and practices of international financial institutions that burden poor countries with mandatory privatization and future unfair debt.

Columbans also recognize that due to overconsumption in wealthy industrialized countries there is an environmental debt to countries particularly in the Global South from where much of the world's natural resources are extracted. These wealthy countries have a greater responsibility to mitigate against and pay for responses to crises such as climate change. Pope Francis speaks of ecological debt in *Laudato Si'*, "The developed countries ought to help pay this debt by significantly limiting their consumption of non-renewable energy and by assisting poorer countries to support policies and programmes of sustainable development."

Socially and Environmentally Responsible Investing

The Society has as a fundamental part of its identity a commitment to the poor and to the exploited earth which calls us to solidarity and stewardship. Our Society's Constitutions articulate this commitment in this way:

Striving to have the Kingdom of God permeate the lives and cultures of all peoples, we proclaim the universal message of salvation through witness, ministry and dialogue from the standpoint of solidarity with the poor.

We are mindful of our obligation to join with others in the responsible use of the world's resources. Our lifestyle, use of funds and investments are guided by the demands of social justice.

We do not seek to accumulate funds beyond what can be prudently estimated will be needed to meet future obligations. We are very conscious that those funds should be invested in a socially and environmentally responsible manner. We believe our investment policy is an important dimension of our missionary charism which offers a Christian witness in the business community. The Society's strategies to implement Socially and Environmentally Responsible Investment (SRI) include: Positive Impact Investing, Negative and Avoidance Screens, Corporate Advocacy, Divestment, and Networking.

Networking and Mobilizing

Columbans participate in a number of national and international networks and partnerships that address Peace and related issues.

Australia and New Zealand

- Jubilee Australia
- Australia Fair Trade and Investment Network

Britain

- Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility
- EIRIS

- [Jubilee UK](#)
- Global Justice Now
- New Economics Foundations
- Pax Christi UK

Chile

- Economia Solidaria

Ireland

- Debt and Development Coalition

USA

- Faith Economy Ecology and Transformation Network
- Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility
- Interfaith Working Group for Trade and Investment
- Jubilee USA

Columban Centers and Organizations for Economic Justice Advocacy, Education, and Projects

Australia and New Zealand

[Columban Peace Ecology and Justice Center](#)

Chile

Centro Misionero San Columbano

Perú

Centro Columbano de Estudios Misioneros

Philippines

Negros Nine Foundation

PREDA

Subanen Crafts Project

USA

[Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach](#)

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