

In today's world, many live a flourishing life surrounded by the wonders of technology. However, smartphones and electric vehicles have a massive humanitarian cost despite their eco-friendly facade. The African country of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which exports two-thirds of the world's cobalt (a vital resource for the batteries of these technologies) relies on millions of artisanal miners to keep its market going. In stark contrast to a seemingly gargantuan profit, these miners struggle to put food on the table, barely surviving on a dollar a day. Fortunately, the Good Shepherd International Foundation is creating a substantial change, transforming their lives completely by applying the 'engage, listen, do' process.

Catholics can 'engage' with Congolese artisanal miners by understanding the many injustices they face to survive. To 'engage' means to describe the problem, starting from reality to understand it in its social, political, economic and cultural dimensions. As pressure grows globally to combat climate change, millions desperately flock to the outskirts of cobalt mines-often owned by foreign companies-in the hope of making an income. A poll conducted by the GSIF of Congolese citizens found only 53% have access to clean drinking water and all children could not remember when they had their last meal; of these, 50% were orphans (Good Shepherd International Foundation, n.d.). These miners risk health issues later in life from prolonged cobalt exposure such as respiratory disease, heart failure and cancer. More concerning, if they are caught trespassing by company members, this can lead to the 'eviction of entire communities and grievous human rights abuses including sexual assault, arson and beatings' (Amnesty International, 2023). Widespread corruption nationwide means arrest and death are also possible, even for activists and journalists who expose this injustice. For example, one woman tragically lost her son when he was killed while mining. Shockingly, nothing was done about it by the mine owner, forcing her and her family to suffer financially and emotionally. Therefore, by 'engaging' with artisanal miners, Catholics can stand in solidarity with them, obliging themselves to help them achieve their full potential.

Catholics can 'listen' to the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) of Preferential Option for the Poor to apply to this issue. To 'listen' means to reflect on the situation in light of Church morals, to gain new insights and meanings for how to solve it. One of these morals, Preferential Option for the Poor, means people disadvantaged by material deprivation, unjust oppression, illness and other forms of misery should be given preferential love, since Jesus had a special love for the poor. This value upholds another CST, that of human dignity, which means every human being is sacred and to always be respected as offspring of God, created in His image. However, miners' dignity is unacknowledged by mining companies, begging Preferential Option for the Poor for help. Australian theologian Dr. Sandie Cornish sees it as 'following... Jesus'; a 'conscious choice to be in solidarity with' and 'preference or priority in our love to those who are poor' (Cornish, n.d.). Thus, it is *preferential* to who it deals with and an *option* as a deliberate choice to support them, neither of which is shown by the companies that purely put profit over people. Similarly, Scripture states, 'there will... be some in need on... earth... "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land"' (*Deuteronomy 15:11*). Hence, this CST is mandated by God, calling His people to uplift the poor. According to St. Ambrose, "You are not making a gift... you are giving him back what is his... earth belongs to everyone" (Paul VI, 1967, section 23). He means that although it may seem

like it at times, the world does not completely belong to the rich, since God entrusted His Earth for everyone who abides in it to share. This includes those at the foot of the production pyramid (considering technology magnates are at the peak). Therefore, by 'listening' to the Catholic Social Teaching of Preferential Option for the Poor, Catholics have an inner moral compass to guide them towards uplifting miners, thereby following the teachings of Jesus.

By 'doing' humanitarian work to uplift the dignity of artisanal miners, the Good Shepherd International Foundation is slowly rectifying this social injustice. To 'do' is to plan a realistic and effective strategy to change a situation through the will of God, thereby bringing it closer to His reign. For example, in 2013, this Catholic organisation initiated a program in the DRC to uphold the human dignity of women and children in eight artisanal mining communities. It aims to end child labour, strengthen child protection systems and provide access to their basic human rights. It also advocates for the equitable distribution of resources and to increase the liability of mining companies heartlessly manipulating rising cobalt demand. So far, over 4,800, or 90% of children have been saved (Good Shepherd International Foundation, n.d.). Now, they receive free education, healthcare and skills training to guide them towards a brighter future. Member Sister Justicia Nekesa Pili explained in an ABC News documentary, "If... schools are spread all over and every child goes to school, then we are redeeming this country" (Davie, 2022). By giving even outcasts a chance to escape their misery, the organisation truly upholds Preferential Option for the Poor, helping them catch up to others well ahead of them in society. Thus, through their humanitarian efforts under the will of God, the Good Shepherd International Foundation is effectively 'doing' good for the artisanal miners.

Although the Good Shepherd International Foundation is changing lives through the 'engage, listen, do' process, they cannot bring permanent reform alone. They also need consumers and mining companies to reflect on their past decisions and current viewpoints. The question that needs to be asked is, "Is a product safe for our environment really safe for *all mankind*?" Only until this question is answered in the negative by everyone on both sides of this issue can God's plans come to fruition, where everyone will be regarded equally as fellow sheep in His flock.

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