



The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice

Working for social and economic change tackling poverty and exclusion

Members:  
The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul,  
The Vincentian Congregation,  
The Daughters of Charity  
and  
The Sisters of the Holy Faith

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice  
Ozanam House  
53 Mountjoy Square  
Gardiner St.  
Dublin 1

Tel: 01 8780425

Fax: 01 8780423

Email: [vpj@eircom.net](mailto:vpj@eircom.net)

Websites:

[www.vpsj.ie](http://www.vpsj.ie)

[www.vote.ie](http://www.vote.ie)

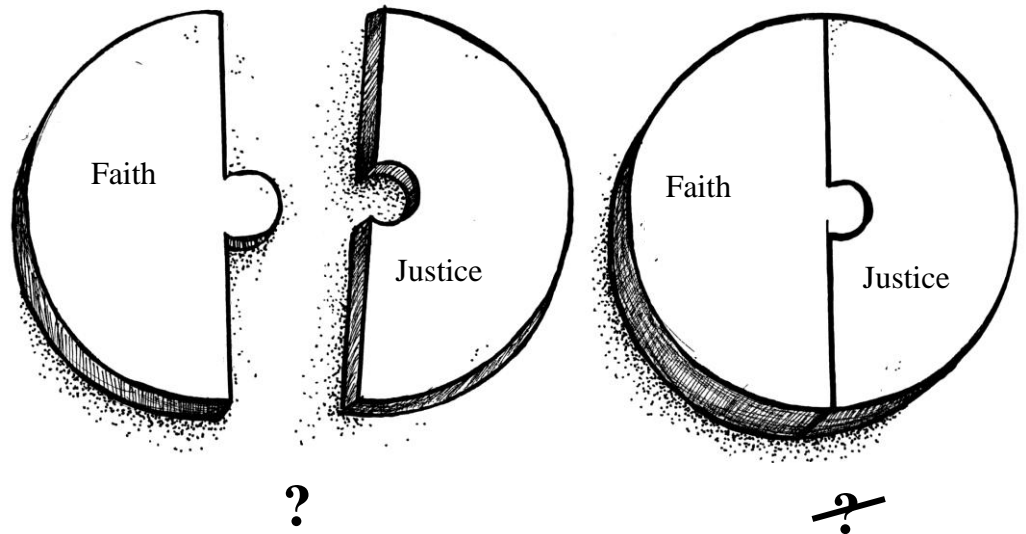
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# JUST.NOW

January – February 2008 Justice Briefing

## Faith and Justice



A well known former M.P. for Northern Ireland is often quoted for her statement:

"All socialists are not Christian but one cannot be a Christian and not be a socialist".

At the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 2007 meeting of 120 members of the wider Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice frequent reference was made to the need for a spirituality which integrates faith and justice.

When considering future directions for the work of the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice priority was given to the development of such a spirituality. In an attempt to renew reflection on the matter and in response to requests from many of the participants of the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 'Gathering' this edition of Just.Now focuses on the presentation 'Faith and Justice' given by Sr. Margo Delaney C.H.F. at the Conference.

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice would be very pleased to hear from any reader who would like to contribute to our effort to articulate a spirituality for justice.

## The Link Between Faith and Justice

### Is there a link between faith and justice?

This is a key question for all of us, drawn together here today by the Vincentian Partnership for Justice. It is key because it asks us to reflect on the motivation, the inspiration, the source of energy that calls us to live a just faith and the spirituality which underpins this.

If the request to consider this question of the link between faith and justice had come to you, where would you have begun to look for the core of the issue? Probably like me, you too would have been drawn to The Scriptures and Catholic Social Teaching as the essential guides in this area.

As we reflect, the question arises: is there a central concept that emerges which links faith and justice?

After very little reflection it becomes clear that right relationships is key and that crucially this depends on respect for the dignity of the other. The notion of dignity is the jewel at the heart of the link.

### The Interconnectedness of All Creation

Formerly we spoke in terms of the dignity of the human being. But now as we grow in our understanding of the earth story and the threat to this precious gift of our universe, we speak in terms of the dignity of all creatures.

We seek to understand this in the context of a global world, a world of shifting horizons and of rapid and vast changes. Speaking of this reality in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, published forty years ago this year, Pope Paul VI stated:

*Today it is most important for people to understand and appreciate that the social question ties (all men) together, in every part of the world (no.3).*

Even then, CST was indicating the oneness of all creation, a oneness built on respect.



### Our Interconnected World - The Dark Side

As we consider the link within the context of a global world, we view it in either a negative or positive way. To begin with we will look briefly at the negative impact of globalisation.

As you are well aware, many of the issues of today's global world cry out for the awareness and action of people of faith who cherish the dignity of all creatures.

Often, our poets and prophets give us an insight into the reality of our times long before we are aware of it ourselves.

In 1954, Christopher Fry, in his sobering poem,

**A Sleep of Prisoners**, wrote

*Thank God our time is now when wrong*

*Comes up to face us everywhere*

*Never to leave us till we take*

*The longest stride of soul we ever took*

*Affairs are now soul size*

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And you will remember Jon Sobrino (former Jesuit and well-known South American theologian). Recently, in his contribution to a series of reflections to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *Populorum Progressio*, he wrote

*What is at stake is the salvation and humanisation of a civilisation that is gravely ill.*

I invite you to think, for one second, of an aspect of our world that springs to mind when you think of this statement. No doubt the following list includes some of the issues that come to mind for you.

Poverty, hunger, migration, refugees and asylum seekers, unfair trade, debt, HIV/AIDS, destruction of species, global warming, feminisation of poverty, wars/conflicts, loss of meaning, family disintegration, etc, etc.

**Let us look at the reality behind a few of these problems.**

**POVERTY:** every hour 1,200 children die away from the glare of media attention; this is the equivalent of 3 tsunamis a month, every month, hitting the world's most vulnerable citizens - its children. Causes of death vary but the overwhelming majority can be traced to a single contributing factor: poverty (UNDP 2006)

**The UN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT OF 2006** highlights the growing gulf between those who "have", the one fifth of humanity that thinks nothing of spending \$2 on a cappuccino, and those who "have-not", the one fifth of humanity that survives on less than a dollar a day"

**TRADE:** in Japan, each cow is subsidised by a payment of 4 US dollars a day; most African people live on less than a dollar a day

**DEBT:** \$330 billion dollars of debt in Africa

**REFUGEES:** \$20.8 million

**CONFLICTS:** spend of \$1.03 trillion on military activities

**HIV/AIDS:** 230 deaths a day in Zambia (facts taken from UN Reports 2005, 06)



**How to Respond to Such Situations?**

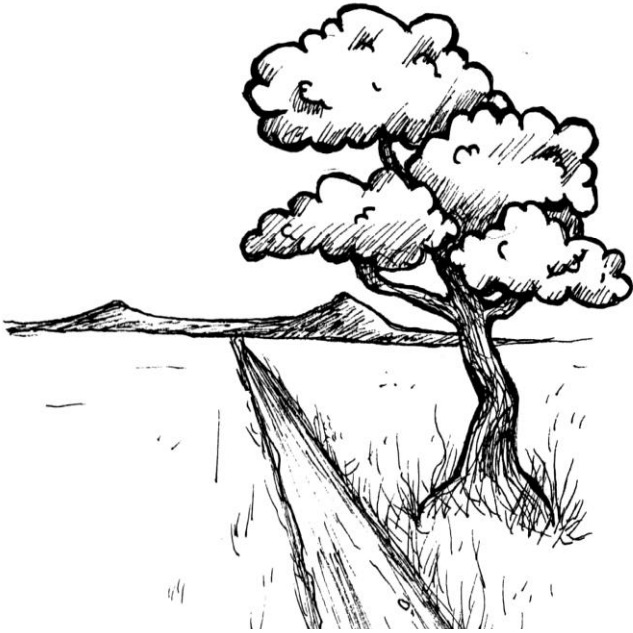
Leonard Boff puts it simply:

*If there was sufficient humanity and compassion among human beings to reduce the 225 largest fortunes of the world by just 4% there would be enough food, water, health and education for all.*  
(Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor)

This is all about human dignity. As people of faith, surely it is essential that we are aware of and pained by the scandal of growing imbalance throughout the world. And perhaps it is even more crucial we reclaim key truths of our faith to enable us become informed and active in seeking to bring God's love and healing to all hearts who cause and who suffer from this divide. We need to own our part in this structure of sin and undertake the journey into seeking to:-

## The Link Between Faith and Justice

turn around the situation - *conversion*  
change patterns and practices - *transformation*  
bring in the new reality of God's reign - *salvation*



Such a journey will not be easy for it will threaten us in our comfort and in our clichéd views of those who are poor. It will involve risk taking and certainly inner conflict. It requires a set of very coherent virtues, best summarised in Ignatio Ellacuria's reflection:

*It is only in the spirit of **idealism** and **hope** that one can have the **faith** and **courage** to try with all the poor and oppressed people to **re-orient history, to subvert it and to launch it in another direction.***

This is a collaborative act. We know that God is there before we begin and that people have the resources needed, provided they are accorded dignity and respect; to quote Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Zambian theologian:

*People do not get developed, but they develop themselves.*

### For Human Beings to Flourish

This then is the work of just faith, to strive to achieve those elements of human development which Paul VI outlines in *Populorum Progressio* (and we are now looking at how globalisation can impact positively on the lives of those poorest and most marginalised).

He speaks of human flourishing in terms of -

- possession of necessities, safe environment, access to culture
- increased esteem for the dignity of others
- an inclination to the spirit of poverty, the will for peace
- recognition of God as the source of all (PP no 21)

From this list, let us focus briefly on one aspect which is becoming ever more crucial to our understanding of our role as people who seek to participate in ushering in God's kingdom of justice and peace for all, namely that of living in a safe environment.

The Compendium of Catholic social Teaching (CST) states:

*Climate is a good that must be protected (C of CST, 2004 No. 470)*

*..and (all have )the right to a safe and healthy environment (ibid )468*

But what CST has failed to recognise is that this can only happen in a safe and nourishing environment, a point made by Sean McDonagh in his contribution to the reflection on *Populorum Progressio*;

*...Life giving human social relations are always embedded in **vibrant** and **sustainable** ecosystems.*

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### Three Significant Developments

There is no doubt that we are being called to live our faith in a new world context. And how graced we are that, in the past thirty years, three significant developments have taken place which serve to help us understand this link between faith and justice.

**Firstly**, there is the development in Catholic Social Teaching, which though imbued with the notion of dignity, placed this in a rather narrow context. Now with the continual development over the years, CST invites us to live *generous self forgetfulness, plus a belief in the possibility of radically changing society.. [and] providing a cause that brings meaning to life and value to sacrifice..* (S. Murphy, *The Many Ways of Justice*)

**Secondly**, the development in the theology of grace; this emerged from Vatican II, and in Hans Kung's succinct language, it has led to the understanding of the *deprivitisation of grace and the call to witness to faith in the public arena.*

**Thirdly**, developments in the field of practical theology which has led to an expansion of our understanding of faith as being identified with charitable works to the neglect of justice [Walter Bruggeman: *The Prophetic Imagination*]

### The Call to Contemplation

This new understanding equips us to live a just faith in a global context, provided we attune ourselves to the energy of grace at work in our lives and in our world. How can we do this? By embracing a twofold process of contemplation and informed action, cultivated by:

**Silence** - the setting aside of our ordinary ways of knowing to encounter God, a practice which puts problems in their right context, reduces

them to size, gives more energy, and a better quality with which to work. (Gendlin)

**Purposeful listening** - listening with our inner being with the intention of being led to an outward response, by listening to those who speak with wisdom, to those who bear the pain of poverty of life, and to knowing that God's energy will enable hope triumph over all darkness.

**Sabbath** - to model our life's rhythm on God's example, and choose to stop because *we have no need to be more secure, affluent, more in command or more noticed* (Harris).

**Celebration** - to know the joy that comes from contributing to lifting the burden of life from others and in this joy, we are then sent out again to

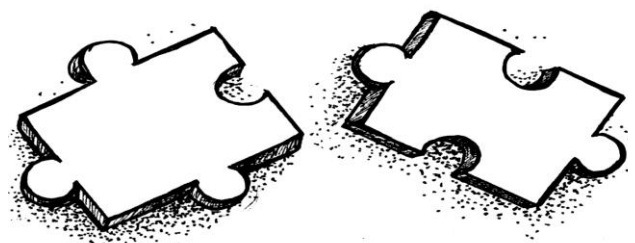
**Action** - informed action that seeks to build the reign of justice and peace.

We live at a time of immense opportunity and of harsh struggle in which the demands of a just faith call us to ever greater awareness.

To end as we began with Christopher Fry's *Sleep of Prisoners*:

*Affairs are now soul size.*

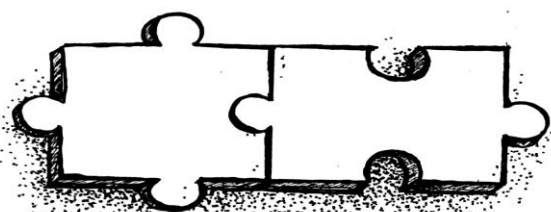
*The enterprise is exploration into God.*



Faith

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Justice



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Faith Justice

## The Link Between Faith and Justice

### What can I do?

**Silence:** cultivate times and places of silence to allow the "still, small voice" of the Spirit to work in my heart, deepening my awareness of God's desire to show compassion to our suffering world through me

**Listen:** take time to slow down and listen to the suffering of those whom I condemn to invisibility by my lack of awareness

**Sabbath:** enjoy Sabbath rest so as to allow myself know that the work of living a just faith is essentially God's work of grace in me

**Act:** move with courage into action that is grounded in the truth of a situation and not simply a media-led analysis which sometimes distorts the truth in favour of drama

**Celebrate:** rejoice with others in each small victory that brings greater dignity and hope to those who suffer

### A God - Sized Vision

Martin Luther King Jr. is celebrated as the Dreamer.

He was more than a dreamer, however.

He was a visionary who drum-majored a liberation parade that challenged and changed the status quo.

He was killed not for dreaming. He was assassinated because his vision prophetically spoke the truth to a powerful status quo.

A God-sized vision will always challenge the territorial custodians of what has been.

Change is painful and must be nurtured and negotiated, or the vision or pastoral tenure will be assassinated!

Frederick D. Haynes 111: "From Vision to Action" (taken from SOJOURNERS WEB SITE)





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## **FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT 25 FEB – 9 MARCH 2008**

An opportunity to live a faith that does justice.  
Many events are being organised by volunteers in  
60 Fairtrade Town groups in Ireland.  
Each of us can become a Fairtrade person.

**"STEP by STEP  
WE can CHANGE the WORLD when we SHOP"**

### **What is Fairtrade?**

Many farmers and workers in developing countries struggle to provide for their families. Poor market access and unfair trade often mean that the price they get for their crop does not cover the cost of production.

Fairtrade labelling is a rapidly growing international system which seeks to guarantee a better deal for farmers and workers in the developing world. A product that is Fairtrade certified carries a label, the FAIRTRADE Mark.

Fairtrade Mark Ireland  
Carmichael House  
North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7  
Tel: 01 4753515  
Email: [Info@fairtrade.ie](mailto:Info@fairtrade.ie)  
Web: [www.fairtrade.ie](http://www.fairtrade.ie)

### **Who is behind Fairtrade?**

Fairtrade Mark Ireland is the independent certification body in Ireland that awards the FAIRTRADE Mark to products which meet Fairtrade standards. Internationally there are 20 countries that are members of the standards setting and certification body

Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO).

Producer organizations are also members of FLO. In Ireland the FAIRTRADE Mark is supported by all the main overseas development agencies and by the ICTU.

In Ireland sales of Fairtrade certified products grew by over 75% in 2006 and strong growth is continuing. This growth in Fairtrade is driven by consumers wanting to make a difference - and by businesses responding to this pressure. Some recent decisions by businesses in Ireland and internationally to convert 100% of products to Fairtrade show how much more can be done. We all know how much more needs to be done.

### **Fairtrade Products**

Coffee, tea, chocolate, cocoa, sugar, bananas, grapes, pineapples, mangoes, avocados, citrus and other fresh fruits, dried fruit, juices, biscuits, cakes and snacks, honey, chutneys and sauces, rice, herbs and spices, seeds, nuts and nut oil, wines, beer, confectionery, muesli, cereal bars, ice cream, flowers, sports balls, products made from Fairtrade Certified cotton including; sheets and Towels, clothing, cloth toys and cotton wool.

### **Where can I buy them?**

You can find products carrying the FAIRTRADE Mark in supermarkets, local stores, in cafes, bars and restaurants, health food and fair trade shops, from catering suppliers, by mail order and online.



# Prayer and Reflection

## Opening Reflection

We are aware social injustice pervades much of our world and many of our brothers and sisters throughout creation needlessly suffer as a result. *(Pause for reflection)*

The world is not as God would have it. 30,000 people will die of hunger today! This is not what God wants, it is instead the cost of our sinfulness paid with the lives of the powerless.

But we cannot allow ourselves the luxury of hopelessness and helplessness which will inevitably lead to apathy.

We are instead called to be Christ in the world, to confront the structures of injustice

We have hope in a God who is love, who invites love, and who brings love. We hope in the Lord and strive to fulfill our mission of active and engaged discipleship.

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## Reflection

"Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." Indeed, we as Catholics are called to recognize our God in the marginalized of our world.

We are to work and pray ceaselessly for the end of hunger, division, and violence, for the elimination of structural sin. This is what it means to be a disciple of the Jesus in the world today.

In 1971, the World Synod of Bishops declared, "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation" (6).

In other words, we cannot separate our Catholic faith from the struggle for justice. Justice is "constitutive", it is essential, it makes faith what faith is.

Therefore, our faith must be fundamentally oriented towards confronting structural sin and actively building the systems necessary to ensure that every human person "might have life and have it to the full" (*John 10:10*).

## A Reading from the Gospel according to Matthew

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him.

And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.'

Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'

And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'

## A Reflection from the World Synod of Bishops

In the face of the present-day situation of the world, marked as it is by the grave sin of injustice, we recognize both our responsibility and our inability to overcome it by our own strength. Such a situation urges us to listen with a humble and open heart to the word of God, as he shows us new paths towards action in the cause of justice in the world.

In the Old Testament God reveals himself to us as the liberator of the oppressed and the defender of the poor, demanding from people faith in him and justice towards one's neighbor. It is only in the observance of the duties of justice that God is truly recognized as the liberator of the oppressed.

By his action and teaching Christ united in an indivisible way the relationship of people to God and the relationship of people to each other. Christ lived his life in the world as a total giving of himself to God for the salvation and liberation of people. In his preaching he proclaimed the fatherhood of God towards all people and the intervention of God's justice on behalf of the needy and the oppressed (*Lk 6: 21-23*). In this way he identified himself with his "least ones," as he stated: "As you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (*Mt 25:40*)

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