

DIGNITAS HUMANA

Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace

Christchurch Diocese, October 2001

Globalisation and the Catholic Church

July 2001 saw the so called G8 Summit take place in Genoa. As in Gothenberg at the EU meeting, as in Seattle at the World Trade Organisation meeting, proceedings did not run smoothly as thousands of protesters converged on the city determined to make their various objections seen and heard. Stringent security provisions were in place because of the real fear that elements committed to violence would infiltrate the peaceful demonstrators. Some protests were about the need to relieve the debt of poor countries; others were concerned about environmental issues. Many present were opposed to globalisation.

Pope John Paul II spoke about globalisation earlier this year, in an address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (27 April, 2001). He related it to the collapse of the collectivist system in Central and Eastern Europe with the subsequent effects this collapse had on the Third World countries. It meant that the market economy had virtually conquered the whole world. While this globalisation of commerce is complex and rapidly evolving, its prime characteristic is the increasing *elimination of barriers to the movement of people, capital, and goods*. This apparent triumph of the market and its logic is bringing rapid changes to social systems and cultures which many people, especially the disadvantaged, experience as something forced on them rather than a process in which they can actively participate.

The market economy is a way of adequately responding to economic needs while respecting peoples' free initiative. It has to be controlled by the community, the social body with its common good. The present age sees commerce and communications no longer bound by borders. This means that the universal common good requires the control mechanisms that will prevent the reduction of all social relations to economic factors. Such mechanisms are also required to protect those caught in new forms of exclusion or marginalization.

Globalisation, a priori, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it. No system is an end in itself, and it is necessary to insist that globalisation, like any other system, must be at the service of the human person; it must serve solidarity and the common good.

Globalisation has become a cultural phenomenon. *The market as an exchange mechanism has become the medium of a new culture. The logic of the market is intrusive and invasive so that it reduces more and more the area available to the human community for voluntary and public action at every level. The market*

imposes its way of thinking and acting, and stamps its scale of value upon behaviour. Those affected by globalisation see it as a destructive flood which threatens the social norms that have always protected them and the cultural reference points that have given them direction in life. This is so because changes in technology and work relationships are moving too quickly for cultures to respond. The social, legal and cultural structures, carefully built up to protect individuals and intermediary groups, risk being destroyed by new styles of working, living and organising communities.

Likewise, the use made of discoveries in the biomedical field is tending to catch legislators unprepared. Research is often financed by private groups and its results are commercialised before the process of social control has had a chance to respond.

There is an obvious need to control these developments and to make sure that new practices respect fundamental human values and the common good. Human persons and human communities require the *priority of ethics* over technological innovation.

However, patterns of ethical thinking are now emerging which are themselves by-products of globalisation and bear the stamp of utilitarianism. This is an example of ethics unworthy of the name. Ethical values cannot be dictated by technological innovations, engineering or efficiency; they are grounded in the very nature of the human person. Ethics cannot be the justification or legitimation of a system, but rather the safeguard of all that is human in any system. Ethics demands that systems be attuned to the need of man, and not that man be sacrificed for the sake of the system. One evident consequence of this is that the ethics committees now usual in almost every field should be completely independent of financial interests, ideologies and partisans of political views.

The Church takes the view that two inseparable principles must govern all ethical discernment in the context of globalisation:

Globalisation must not be a new version of colonialism. It must respect the diversity of cultures

** First, the inalienable value of the human person, source of all human rights and every social order. The human being must always be the end and not a means, a subject and not an object, nor a commodity of trade.*

** Second, the value of human cultures, which no external power has the right to downplay and still less to destroy.*

which, within the universal harmony of peoples, are life's interpretive keys. In particular, it must not deprive the poor of what remains most precious to them, including their religious beliefs and practices, since genuine convictions are the clearest manifestation of human freedom.

Humanity, embarking on the process of globalisation, requires a common code of ethics. This does not mean a single, dominant socio-economic system or culture which would impose its values and its criteria on ethical reasoning. It is within man as such, within universal humanity sprung from the Creator's hand, that the norms of social life are to be sought.

The search for a common code of ethics is indispensable if globalisation is not to be just another name for the absolute relativisation of values and the homogenisation of life-styles and cultures.

In all the variety of cultural forms, universal human values exist and they must be brought out and emphasized as the guiding force of all development and progress so that globalisation will be at the service of the whole person and of all people.

The morality of responding to terrorism

What does Catholic faith tell us when it comes to responding to terrorism? Professor Germain Grisez, who teaches moral theology at a seminary at Emmitsburg, near Washington DC, has offered these thoughts:

Terrorism carries out an intention to kill or injure people and/or to destroy or damage things of value in order to instil fear so as to motivate desired behaviour. Instilling fear so as to motivate desired behaviour is often counterproductive, but doing so sometimes is good and even necessary. Yet even if instilling fear is appropriate, terrorism is a morally unacceptable means, just because terrorists intend (though not as their ultimate objective or goal) precisely to kill, injure, destroy or damage.

People have at times put an end to isolated individual's acts of terrorism by killing them. However, terrorism carried out by members of a widespread group for ideological ends that appeal to extremists in that group presents a far greater challenge. Any possible response is likely to have only limited success at best. Yet when a community undergoing terrorist attack deliberates about how to respond, anger and hate induce the illusion that very violent responses are likely - and perhaps almost certain - to succeed.

The use of force to prevent terrorism can be justifiable and morally required of those responsible for defending the community. Even deadly force may be used against those one reasonably expects will

otherwise continue to pose a grave threat. But force, especially deadly force, must never be used to avenge past acts or as terrorism to prevent terrorism. Such uses of force, even against military forces and assets, are morally unacceptable.

Moreover, when stopping terrorism requires the use of force against the activities of terrorists or of people complicit in their terrorism, any foreseeable damage to innocents (that is people not engaged in those activities) must be no more than what those using the force would think it fair to accept if the innocents were their own friendly associates.

Responses to terrorism that are morally unjustifiable also are foolish. They provoke greater and more widespread anger and hatred: seven other demons will take the place of the first, and small atomic bombs will be used instead of hijacked airliners.

Even when carried out within proper limits, deadly force against persons cannot be an adequate response to terrorism. A sound response must also include a very serious and sincere effort to improve relationships with less radical members of the group whose interests the terrorists are trying to promote by their bad means. That serious effort at reconciliation must be implemented by economic and political action designed to mitigate suffering and reduce hatred.

A morally upright and wise policy may well turn out to be very demanding and costly. For instance, it might involve sending millions of men rather than dropping thousands of tons of bombs. But whatever the costs, only a morally upright and wise policy will be worth its price.

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The importance of good housing policies

It has always been the dream of most New Zealanders to own their own home. Up until a few years ago, 70% of us either did, or were paying off the mortgage in order to fulfil the dream. Others, though, have never been in this situation, often for reasons beyond their control.

Television news and newspapers have been informing us, and showing us images, of desperate housing situations long absent from this country. People have been living in caravans, garages, dilapidated shanties, often without electricity or running water, often in overcrowded conditions. Fires, sometimes with fatal consequences, have become a recurring feature of poor housing in rural areas. The most extreme dimension of the housing problem is the situation facing Maori communities in the Far North and East Cape of the North Island. Hundreds of persons have returned from

the cities in order to live on tribal lands in isolated country areas, usually for reasons of unemployment and poverty.

Similar housing conditions led the first Labour government under Michael Joseph Savage to adopt a policy of State housing after the depression of the 1930's. In the 1980's, Labour governments paved the way for the dispersal of public services and state assets which continued under National governments in the 1990's.

The present coalition Labour – Alliance government has kept its word and honoured its election policy to return state housing rentals to a level of former times, twenty five percent of income. There is no doubt that this has given genuine help to some of those most in need. In its turn, the Christchurch City Council has alerted the wider community to the desirable social benefits of investing in housing. It now has a stock of 2,600 rental units and claims have been made that no one in Christchurch need be homeless.

The moral question.

The Church's view is that the family has a right to decent housing, fitting for family life and commensurate to the number of its members, in a physical environment that provides the basic services for the life of the family and the community.

To be homeless means to suffer from the deprivation or lack of something which is due. It is an injustice. Any person or family that, without any direct fault, does not have suitable housing, is the victim of an injustice.

This is so because of the universal destination of goods. God destined the earth and all it contains for all people so that all created goods would be shared fairly by all under the guidance of justice tempered by charity.

Housing is a basic social good and cannot be simply considered a market commodity.

Quite simply, our society, and its government, have to have a housing policy that enables all persons to have a place of shelter adequate to their needs. Public authority has the role of protecting the common good - that combination of living conditions without which all the people cannot achieve their fulfilment, as persons or as families.

Poverty and its consequences in New Zealand

During September and October 2000 the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services of which Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand is a member, conducted a pilot project to give an assessment of the information, which was available from the Social Service Agencies of the

country. To run the pilot seven sites were chosen across the country. The selection was made on the basis that they had the following services available: a foodbank and/or a budgeting service, a process in place for collecting data and the capability of consistently reporting on data every three months for at least two years. The Christchurch City Mission represents the Christchurch area.

Following the pilot scheme, the first initial three months of the survey showed the seven food banks taking part assisted 5,061 people. It also indicated that a high percentage of those who benefit from a food parcel are under the age of 18. In the demographic profile of clients, the results for the first quarter back up those revealed in the pilot. Some of these characteristics are: an over representation of Maori and Pacific Island people, the high proportion of solo parent families, mostly headed by women, the low proportion of the use of food banks by the elderly and the higher proportions of single males using inner city agencies.

One of the main similarities between foodbank applicants is their lack of income. Housing is the main cost for those surveyed. The survey showed that 50% of the households coming to the South Island foodbanks in the second quarter of the survey had less than \$163 per week to spend on food, phone, transport, doctors etc. This consistent lack of income is what leads people to seek this assistance.

People on low incomes budget carefully and there is nothing left for paying for emergencies or celebrations. Frequently clients of these agencies are unaware of how much they owe in total. Decisions have to be made about which of the services these people will have to do without e.g. power, telephone, visits to the doctor, etc.

We acknowledge the valuable information received from The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services. All members of the Council are committed to finding ways to give assistance to the poor and vulnerable in our society, of giving human dignity back to those in need. Our own Catholic Social Services provides food bank and budgeting assistance to those in need here in Christchurch.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church in article 3 on Social Justice, Respect for the Human person states:

The duty of making oneself a neighbour to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. "As you did it to one of these the least of my brethren, you did it to me."

Reforming prostitution in New Zealand

Our House of Representatives is giving consideration to a Bill aimed at remedying and preventing abuses and

violations of personal dignity which accompany the social practice of prostitution.

In the view of the Commission, the Bill ignores the profound degradation of persons involved in prostitution

itself, both providers and clients. Traditionally, both society and the Church have considered prostitution an objective moral evil and socially undesirable when judged by the Christian understanding of sexuality, the dignity of the person and marriage.

Catholic teaching is that all sexual activity belongs within the stable and faithful relationship that is marriage. In mature relationships, spouses reveal themselves in all aspects of personality, not simply the sexual dimensions. Women are to be treated as equals and deserving of respect; they are not subordinate partners in relationships. Prostitution does not foster communication, respect for the person or the development of a faithful and loving relationship. On an individual level it is dehumanising and depersonalising.

Our Commission believes that the proposed reform will lead to an increase in prostitution and, more seriously, to its “normalisation”, its acceptance as a legitimate business no different to any other commercial activity. Any such increase will have an adverse effect on society. More women will be put at risk of further abuse, family life will be undermined and the ideal of life-long and faithful sexual relationships between men and women obscured. Overseas experiences of decriminalising prostitution have led to its increase.

We know that double standards have long affected this ancient aspect of social life. Only miracles of grace will ever prevent it totally. We do not agree that the proposed Bill fosters the common good of society, which must always advance the dignity of the human person.

Plater College, Oxford, England

The Commission had a recent contact with Plater College when one of its members recently visited Oxford. It is an auxiliary of Brooke University, Oxford, directed by Stratford Caldicott, who is also Director of the Centre for Faith and Culture and the Chesterton Institute.

The College was established in 1921 as the “Catholic Workers College.” The name was later changed to “Plater College” to commemorate Charles Dominic Plater, S.J. who was the inspiration for its foundation. Fr Plater saw that Christians had a particular responsibility to seek and to understand the social implications and the material benefits that industrialisation had brought to England. He felt that Christians had to try to alleviate or eradicate problems

that arose from the new industrialised society. He recognised that the task required both an understanding of the social implications of the Gospel and of social ethics, together with a knowledge of social science disciplines. Since working people and their families more than anyone else were affected by societal changes, he believed that they should be equipped to taken an active and leading part in the work of social reform.

The College is mainly residential and exists for the education of adults who want to have a “second chance” to gain educational qualifications. The College offers this educational opportunity in a Catholic environment against the background of the social teachings of the Church. The College also aims to produce people who will seek to Christianise contemporary society. As well as the Social Sciences, students can study Theology and Pastoral Studies. The beautiful Chapel is the focus for the spiritual activity and the centre of college life.

In July and August the College is used for the “Plater Summer School”. This year the College celebrated the 80th anniversary of Father Plater’s death. To mark the occasion the School organised a weeklong conference titled “*The Mission of the Baptised: John Paul II’s Challenge to the Laity*”. Topics for discussion included “Catholics in Public Life”, “The Catholic Worker Movement”, “The Challenge of Bioethics”, “Consumerism and Global Solidarity”, “Evangelization Of and Through the Parish Structure”.

Plater College is presently in discussion with the Lateran University of Rome with regard to planning a two-year part-time course, which will result in a Masters Degree in Catholic Social Teaching. It is hoped that his programme will begin in the fall of 2002. Our Commission is grateful for the interest shown in us from Oxford.

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(Latin for the dignity of the person) is the name of this newsletter because it expresses the cornerstone principle of the Church’s teaching about society and social justice. Every human person has an intrinsic and unchanging dignity, conferred by God the Creator. ‘The human person is and ought to be the principle, the subject and the end of all social institutions’. (CCC, No 1881)

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