



ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK

JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION COMMISSION

2010 AUTUMN ASSEMBLY

Why Justice and Peace?

Guest Speakers—Archbishop Peter Smith

Helen O'Brien - Caritas Social Action Network

The Southwark JPIC 2010 Autumn Assembly was held at the Amigo Hall, St George's Cathedral on Saturday October 16th.

We were delighted to welcome Archbishop Peter Smith to his first Justice & Peace event since his appointment to Southwark and Helen O'Brien, the recently appointed Chief Executive of Caritas Social Action Network as well as a good number of J&P supporters from around the diocese.



The morning session started with some lively table discussion which resulted in some interesting feedback, facilitated by Phil Kerton.

Parish group members, although generally fairly few in number are involved in a wide range of activities. Some felt that more effort was needed to get more groups working actively in parishes, all parishes should have a J&P group raising awareness and promoting "the Catholic ethos", and that there were benefits to be gained from getting groups to meet together at deanery level. We do need support from the clergy at parish and deanery level.

It was also felt that we should be doing more to encourage young people towards greater involvement in J&P activities.

Groups were supporting many agencies such as CAFOD and The Manna Centre and were working to raise awareness of local issues such as homelessness and sanctuary seekers.

Support for work overseas, by both fundraising and raising awareness of issues, was mentioned in connection with several countries including Sudan, Haiti, Pakistan, the DRC and Zimbabwe.

Rosa Shea and Bernard White gave an interesting report on the NJPN conference held at Swanwick in July. The topic of the conference was Our Daily Bread: Food Security, People and Planet.

About 400 people attended to hear a number of excellent speakers, particularly mentioned was Vandana Shiva from India who emphasised the benefits of traditional organic farming over GM crops.

A variety of workshops gave delegates opportunities to learn more about topics of particular interest and the debates and final mass were mentioned as particular highlights.

Messages brought away were the need for a living wage for all primary producers, the vital importance of our support for initiatives such as CAFOD's Climate Change Campaign and the need to raise awareness that the world produces enough food for everyone - we just do not do enough to share it. We all have a part to play in working in our parishes to promote Catholic Social Teaching.

The July 2011 conference in on "Justice at Work".

Our first guest speaker was Helen O'Brien who is the recently appointed Chief Executive of the Caritas Social Action Network which is part of Caritas International and an agency of the Bishops' Conference.



CSAN was established in 2003 as a single agency from the amalgamation of three bodies of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales: The Social Welfare Committee, Catholic Child Welfare Council and Catholic Agency for Social Concern (CASC). Some 36 organisations are members covering all aspects of the wider church's work in social action and in meeting the needs of the disadvantaged. Projects and publications include "The Length of Days" (2007) "Catholic Social Justice" (2007) and the film "It's still ME Lord" which explores spirituality and dementia (2009)

Helen gave several examples of projects such as the 5p bus operated by St Cuthberts Care. This helps the poorest families in their area by providing basic clothing and essentials to those in dire need of support. A single-decker bus with the interior converted to accommodate clothes hangers, storage and rummage boxes tours the area with donated clothing, toys and books and some new items such as toiletries. The standard cost per item is 5p.



Helen went on to outline the work of Catholic organisations working quietly giving help to families, providing adoption services, assisting the homeless, empowering migrants through

training, giving support to prisoners and those leaving prison and providing care for the elderly.

The CSAN Impact Survey gave a snapshot of the vast range of work being done by CSAN member organisations, both by volunteers and employees, which is having a positive impact on the most needy in our society.

Our keynote speaker was Archbishop Peter Smith. *(the following is an edited version of Archbishop Peter's talk. The full text can be found on our web site along with Paul Donovan's article and some subsequent contributions from others. Printed copies available from the office on request)*

Last July, Paul Donovan, a journalist who writes for the Universe, wrote a pretty scathing criticism of the National Justice and Peace Network Conference, and expanded his remarks to include the work of Justice and Peace in the Dioceses of England and Wales. He asserted that the commitment at diocesan level has become "pretty sketchy with few dioceses having workers and some lacking commissions." He goes on to assert that CAFOD no longer gives the support it used to, whether financial or otherwise, to Justice and Peace work in the dioceses and offers as an example of what he calls a "more recent player" in the field, groups such as London Citizens which "has proved a good way of getting whole parishes and schools signed up to the work of social justice." However, he says that "community organising is no better at providing a process for the formation of people."

His conclusion is that the "The challenge for J&P is to get that process of formation back, that ability to analyse what is going on in the world and work out a process as to how to inculcate transformative kingdom values into that world. There is an urgent need for these formation processes to begin again at a number of levels".

Well, it was a pretty scathing criticism. Was he accurate? Was he right? Is J & P work being 'sidelined'? Was he throwing down the gauntlet with a touch of hyperbole in order to help re-vitalise the Justice and Peace movement in England and Wales?

The challenge he presents in his conclusion I think is accurate: "The challenge for J&P is to get that process of formation back, that ability to analyse what is going on in the world and work out a process as to how to inculcate transformative kingdom values into that world." He is not saying that the Church in England and Wales is not really involved in putting into effect in very practical ways, some of the key features and demands of Catholic Social Teaching. *(cont...)*

We all know, for example, of the great work of the SVP, of Catholic care homes, of prison visitors, of the thousands involved in caring for the sick, housebound and elderly and in health-care especially in the NHS.

It seems to me he is asking us to consider what is the role and purpose of such groups and Commissions in the extremely complicated society and world in which we live; and to ask that question in the light of what has happened worldwide in terms of the financial crisis and economic recession with all the consequences which we are now just beginning to get to grips with. And to ask it in the context of what has been described as our "Broken Society".

The issues of justice and peace and the environment are certainly essential elements in the broad panorama and very wide agenda of Catholic Social teaching. For us, and for all Christians, the basis and motivation of this moral life and our attitudes towards others is the unconditional love of God for all people, irrespective of race, colour creed or ability. This is the love with which God first loves us and which is revealed in human form in the person, teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Living that Gospel imperative in our own time and in our own society and world is the basis and motivation of Catholic Social Teaching. We all have a duty, as citizens of all faiths and none, to engage appropriately and in accordance with our gifts and talents in political and public life, to promote the common good and do our best to help transform society for the better. I say that because, as Christians, we believe that every person has equal dignity in the eyes of God; a dignity which is God-given and is not grounded in any human quality or accomplishment, nor in race or gender, age or economic status. Despite differences of nationality, race or religion there is one human family and we are made for one another. We are not self-contained, isolated individuals. We are mutually dependent on one another as members of the society in which we live and by virtue of our common humanity.

If we fail to understand and promote that essential element of solidarity with one another, then society begins to break down in the pursuit of individual self-interest - and we can all think of examples of that breakdown in recent years. As we said in our pre-election document, 'Choosing the Common Good', the common good, on the other hand, serves human flourishing and promotes integral human development, and that requires "that people are rescued from every form of poverty, from hunger to illiteracy; it

requires creating equal opportunities for education, creating a vision of true partnership and solidarity between peoples; it calls for active participation in economic and political processes and recognises that every human person is a spiritual being with instincts for love and truth and aspirations for happiness" and the exercise of responsible freedom in the service of truth and love.

The challenge for society is to build up our structures and institutions so that they command the same respect and trust as the individuals who represent them best. We know it can be done, but it requires a new sense of service to others at the heart of our institutions.



Public life in Britain badly needs re-moralising and the injection into it of an element of sincere humility, if people are to regain faith in it. The restoration of trust in institutions, whether in politics or in business, places a particular responsibility on those in leadership roles. It is they who set the tone and help shape the culture of the institutions they lead. Over time leaders can wield immense influence, and carry a heavy responsibility to help bring about a real transformation by their vision and example. As Pope Benedict XVI has said: "development is impossible without upright men and women, without financiers and politicians whose consciences are finely attuned to the requirements of the common good". (*Caritas in Veritate* 71).

Catholic Social Teaching is the fruit of the Gospel imperative to love our neighbour as God has first loved us, that is, with an unconditional love. The implications of that are spelled out in the "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church" which was published and launched in 2004. Speaking at the launch, Cardinal Martino said this: "The *Compendium* has a simple and straight-forward structure. . . three parts. The first . . . deals with the fundamental presuppositions of social doctrine -- God's plan of love for humanity and society, the Church's mission and the nature of social doctrine, (... *Cont....*)

the human person and human rights, and the principles and values of social doctrine. The second part deals with the contents and classical themes of social doctrine – the family, human work, economic life, the political community, the international community, the environment and peace. The third part contains a series of recommendations for the use of social doctrine in the pastoral activity of the Church and in the life of Christians, above all the lay faithful. Pope Benedict, in his speeches and homilies during his visit in September confirmed all this.

‘The central question at issue is this: where is the ethical foundation for political choices to be found? The Catholic tradition maintains that the objective norms governing right action are accessible to reason, presiding from the content of revelation. According to this understanding, the role of religion in political debate is not so much to supply these norms, as if they could not be known by non-believers – still less to propose concrete political solutions, which would lie altogether outside the competence of religion – but rather to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles. This “corrective” role of religion vis-à-vis reason is not always welcomed, though, partly because distorted forms of religion, such as sectarianism and fundamentalism, can be seen to create serious social problems themselves. And in their turn, these distortions of religion arise when insufficient attention is given to the purifying and structuring role of reason within religion. It is a two-way process. Without the corrective supplied by religion, though

reason too can fall prey to distortions, as when it is manipulated by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person. Such misuse of reason, after all, was what gave rise to the slave trade in the first place and to many other social evils, not least the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century. This is why I would suggest that the world of reason and the world of faith – the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief – need one another and should not be afraid to enter into a profound and ongoing dialogue, for the good of our civilization.”

What does all this mean for us? Well, to come back to Paul Donovan’s challenge which I mentioned at the beginning about how Justice and Peace groups can develop “the ability to analyse what is going on in the world and work out a process as to how to inculcate transformative kingdom values into that world.” So perhaps we might start thinking about and analysing the notion of “The Big Society” as put forward by David Cameron. In that, we have a bit of a head start because Philip Blond, a political philosopher whose thinking lies behind the idea, admits to having been influenced by Catholic Social Teaching. So here might be the basis of our involvement in the dialogue between faith and reason, in the light of the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching, so that we can participate fully in promoting the Common Good in our time and in our society. The question I leave you with is this: how might we begin to go about that and encourage others to do the same?

For the final session the Archbishop and Helen O’Brien were joined by Fr Michael Scanlon (JPIC Chair) and Jim Simmons (CAFOD Diocesan Manager) for feedback and questions. A wide



ranging discussion ensued with questioners

particularly interested in how we can develop the work for Social Justice in our diocese and in our parishes.

What can we do to motivate the clergy? Suggestions included meetings of laity and priests within deaneries or area groups.

Should we be making more effort in inviting people into our J&P groups, particularly to build on our increasingly multi-cultural Church - “a great sign of hope”.

Should we be doing more to emphasise the contribution that the Catholic Church is making to the social capital of the country?

The words that hit home most to me were that after Pope Benedict’s visit we should be doing more to proclaim the gospel, not be afraid to engage secular society and must present our faith to the world as a force for good.