



ARCHDIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK

JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION COMMISSION

2009 SPRING ASSEMBLY

Catholic Social Thought in Troubled Times ***Guest Speaker—Dr Patrick Riordan SJ***

The Southwark Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission's Spring Assembly was held at Aylesford Priory on Saturday 30th May. Bishop Pat Lynch and Fr Michael Scanlon, Chair of the Commission welcomed members of Justice & Peace groups from across the diocese.



The lively morning session was taken up by group discussions on the Justice and Peace work in parishes, on racial justice and "The Changing face of Britain" and on the CAFOD climate change campaign.

This proved to be a lively session and a number of excellent points were fed back to the meeting:

- It was felt that it was easy to get money but very difficult to get people actively involved.
- There was a great need to get Parish priests enthused about JPIC issues.
- We should be more active in campaigning on behalf of prisoners of conscience.

- We should get speakers to raise awareness about J&P Issues.
- More effort could be made to write to or e-mail our MPs and work with our local counsellors.
- There is a great need coming up to support CAFOD's Climate Justice Campaign in the run up to the Copenhagen summit. This can be done by lobbying parliament, peaceful demonstrations and the distribution of the cards.
- We should be more active in working with people of other faiths.
- Multi-cultural masses can bring parishioners of all backgrounds together.
- There are needs to support troubled teenagers and babies born to drug dependent mothers.
- We should have prayer cards for unity.
- We are in a privileged situation in having a wide diversity of cultures in our parishes, particularly in SE London.

Work reported as being carried out by parish groups included:

- Regular meetings to encourage and develop J&P work in the parish.
- Running a supper club and other social groups.
- Giving assistance with immigration documents
- Working with Stella Maris to help visiting seamen.
- Actively supporting and promoting CAFOD appeals.
- Raising funds to support parishes in other countries.
- Having a J&P table at parish events.
- Fundraising for homeless projects.
- Organising and promoting Women's' World Day of Prayer.

During the lunch break Archbishop Kevin McDonald took time out from his busy schedule to visit the meeting and chat with the people attending.



Participants also had the opportunity to look at the displays on the stands brought by Housing Justice, SVP, Progressio, Jesuit Refugee Service and CARJ (Catholic Association for Racial Justice).

In the afternoon the keynote speaker was Dr Patrick Riordan SJ, from Heythrop College, who gave a thought provoking and enlightening talk on "Catholic Social Thought in Troubled Times".

He asked three main questions: Is greed to blame? Has capitalism failed? and Is the Common Good the Answer? A show of hands around the room at the start of the talk showed that most were in agreement with the first and third questions. Dr Riordan then went on to show, with quotations from various Papal documents, that these were not simple questions and that, on reflection, he would agree to no more than "maybe" to "is greed to blame" "maybe a little" to "is the Common Good the answer" but with the proviso that we must be cautious, as Catholics, to think we know all the answers.

On the first question: "Is Greed to Blame" he pointed out that big bonuses are encouraged by the structure as we "encourage to reward". There is nothing wrong with desire to better oneself but excess is bad. Greed is therefore not a cause but a consequence of the system. The Catechism tells us: *The desires for good things are good in themselves, but become sources of wrongdoing when they exceed the limits of reason and drive us to covet unjustly what is not ours and belongs to another or is owed to him*" (2535)

"The tenth commandment forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly goods without

limit. It forbids avarice arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power. It also forbids the desire to commit injustice by harming our neighbour in his temporal goods" (§2536)

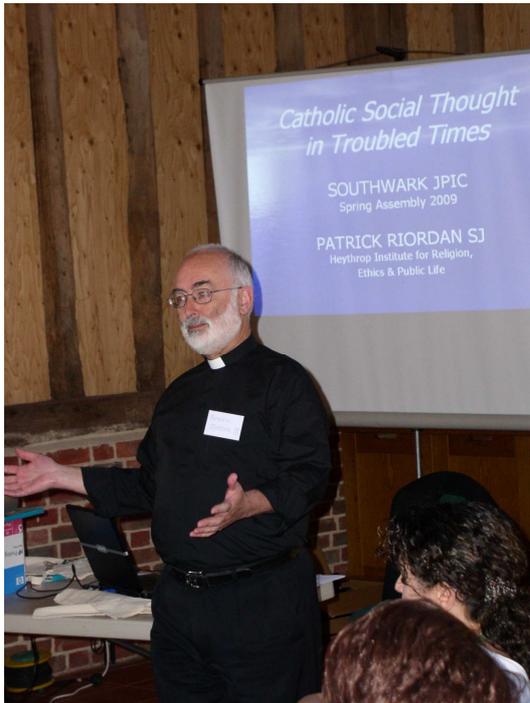
From *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) we learn that the pursuit of wealth, the desire for profit and gain are not wrong in themselves—provided certain conditions are met they are good but if the conditions are not adequately encompassed by regulation they go out of control. Greed is therefore not the cause but a consequence of a lack of due order.

Adam Smith argues that businesses must compete but, Pope Pius XI at the time of the 1930s depression tells us: *"Free competition has committed suicide; economic dictatorship has replaced a free market (QA §109) and, particularly relevant at this time of crisis in banking, "this power becomes particularly irresistible when exercised by those who, because they hold and control money, are able also to govern credit and determine its allotment, for that reason supplying, so to speak, the life-blood to the entire economic body, and grasping, as it were, in their hands the very soul of the economy, so that no one dare breathe against their will"* (QA §106) and further on *"As a result, a much greater number than ever before, solely concerned with adding to their wealth by any means whatsoever, sought their own selfish interests above all things; they had no scruple in committing the gravest injustices against others. Those who first entered upon this broad way which leads to destruction easily found many imitators of their iniquity because of their manifest success, their extravagant display of wealth..."* (QA §134)

In 1991 Pope John Paul II wrote in *Centesimus Annus*: *"It is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards "having" rather than "being", and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself"* (CA §36).

On the second question "Has Capitalism Failed" Dr Riordan quoted Hernando de Soto Polar, the Peruvian economist known for his work on the informal economy and on the importance of property rights. He argues that the Poor are adept at creating wealth and doing deals but cannot take advantage as they are excluded from the (capitalist) market. Organisations such as the Grameen Bank, which offer micro credit for people systemically excluded show the benefits of capitalism in its simplest form.

Centesimus Annus gives us the answer to the question: Capitalism, is it good or bad? *"If by capitalism is meant an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative..... But if by capitalism is meant a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong judicial framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious, then the reply is certainly negative."* (CA §42)



Dr Riordan concluded that Capitalism is therefore not intrinsically wrong but that the system can fail if individuals in a position to avoid social evils fail to do so. As an example he cited traders at institutions such as Bear Stearns who sold as valuable what they knew to be worthless.

For capitalism to grow justly the implications quoted in Centesimus Annus are:

- *That the unfair positions of income and power enjoyed by the more developed economies must be sacrificed*
- *Important changes in established lifestyles must be made*
- *There is a need to limit the waste of environmental and human resources, and enable every individual, and all the peoples of the earth to have a sufficient share of those resources (CA §52)*

On the third question "Is the Common good a solution" Dr Riordan warned us not to claim too much and to pretend to know more than we do. Gaudium et Spes (Vatican II 1965) speaks of *'the common good as the set of conditions which will allow humans as individuals and as groups to achieve their fulfilment'* (§ 26).

No one and no group should be excluded from enjoyment of the goods of the earth and the benefits of social cooperation—
e.g. preferential option for the poor
e.g. celebrate the "Changing Face of Britain"

No aspect of the human good should be excluded from our consideration of what constitutes human flourishing or fulfilment e.g. "not from bread alone".

Applying The Common Good to the economy Dr Riordan advised us to beware of ideology and exaggeration. The market has been quoted as both destroying the Common Good and automatically achieving the Common Good. Not all regulation is good regulation - who will regulate the regulators? Professions selling a service undermine the nature of business (e.g. banking).

To find the balance we need to avoid recent mistakes:

- Professional judgement has been replaced by standardised procedures
- Professions have become "businesses"
- Debt creation and marketing have become separated from bearing the risk: sales are in the driving seat.
- There has been a naive assumption that market analysts stand outside the processes they observe.
- Where there are winners and losers there is no common good.
- Irresponsible behaviour has been allowed to succeed in the short term.
- The design and implementation of the relevant systems has excluded the interests of some.

In conclusion Dr Riordan said that we should understand that the Common Good is that which should not be harmed by the functioning of the markets and suggested that we should be asking what type of supervision is required and how and when and by whom it should be applied in future similar markets. In this way we can identify the Common Good as the answer will be discovered whilst the system is being constructed to resolve these questions.

After a break for refreshments the meeting re-assembled and each table was asked to discuss what they had heard and learnt from the day and then come up with one question.

The questions which followed were wide ranging and challenging. They included:

What may arise from the credit crunch and what should we be doing in our parishes now?

Dr Riordan told us that there was no simple solution and that we must learn to live with tolerance. He advocated prayer and community support coupled with some political activity to make our voice heard.

Should we be keeping on at our MPs mistakes? Should we be taking delight in the misfortune of others?

There is a danger that we are being distracted from more serious issues. It may be time to move on and shift the debate to the more major issues of the world economy and world climate change.

In view of climate problems should we be looking at alternatives to capitalism?

We cannot continue to exploit the earth's resources for our benefit, growth is finite and we will have to learn to adjust our lifestyle. If our emphasis is on production of weapons and cars does this lead to a just quality of life for all?

Can we assume in a secular society that we have shared values?

These are not new problems. Dr Riordan reminded us that Aristotle first thought of "The Common Good" and this was developed by Aquinas and Augustine. An agreement on what is good or bad is needed for "community". Working in "The National Interest" can cause conflict and disunity. We must manage crisis in a way which values the dignity of others.

European Elections—how should we vote?

Firstly it is important to vote. Nobody should be excluded from enjoying the fruits therefore no "Fortress Europe". The Anglican Bishops have said that no Christian should vote for the BNP. Fr Michael mentioned a conversation with a parishioner of Nigerian origin which led him to believe that the basic racist philosophy of the BNP was not fully understood. In reply to a question from the floor propounding the benefits of the Christian Party he advised people to check their web site and make up their own minds.

Should the wealth of the Vatican be sold and the proceeds distributed to the Poor?

Dr Riordan questioned whether the cultural heritage of the Church should be disposed of in this way and whether it was in fact marketable. He quoted an example where a painting left to the Jesuits had been discovered to be an original Caravaggio. This had not been known by the donor but the gift had been given in good faith so should it not be sold. The decision taken was to loan the painting to the National Gallery of Ireland so that all could enjoy it.

How are clergy surviving the recession?

Fr Michael said that parishioners have lost jobs and even homes and this leads to emotional pastoral pressure. There are economic pressures on parishes, people are generous but areas such as Gift Aid may be effected.

How can you regulate capitalism?

Dr Riordan quoted Karl Marx who said that there is a time lag between capitalism developing and regulation developing. Governments cannot fully control the process and, as Christians, we should seek to pinch the bubble of the arrogant politician.

Is our guidance secular or from the Holy Spirit?

It is a core mystery of our faith that God became one of us. In this way God claimed the whole of the secular.

Catholic Social Teaching is the Church's best kept secret. What can we do to make it more widely known?

"The Common Good" made a statement to our politicians and the catholic Church is now more confident in the public arena but we need to talk out and say who we are.

How can you translate "Love your neighbour as yourself"?

Dr Riordan advised that nobody should be excluded from being "my neighbour" and that in discussion of human wellbeing nobody should be denied as "my neighbour".

And there our lively and thought provoking Assembly ended with closing prayers. Those privileged to attend left feeling intellectually stretched and with a much greater understanding of the Church's social teaching.

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