

Biblical Justice, Working for Peace, Ecological Passion

At the Heart of our Preaching and Witness

Realities on our planet Earth are changing so rapidly in recent months that it is almost impossible to keep up with this new awareness. Climate change is forcing a totally new conversation in the body politic. This concern is almost universal. Even Pope Benedict XVI is concerned. His recent homilies and commentaries are about the Ecology and the future fate of our planet and its peoples in all parts of the world. We are noticing the disappearing of the ice in the Canadian Arctic, floods throughout Africa as we write, draught in the West of the United States. We are also noticing new economic and political alliances in the Global South. India and China are now major players in the world's economic structures with China for example holding the debt of the United States. Iran along with India, China, France and Russia are considering moving oil from being tied to the dollar and putting it on the Euro. We are truly a global village and what happens in one part of that village is affecting the whole village.

“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...We very highly commend cooperation with our Christian brethren for the promotion of justice in the world, for bringing about development of peoples and for establishing peace. This cooperation concerns first and foremost activities for securing human dignity and peoples' fundamental rights.” (World Synod of Bishops, Justice in the World, Vatican 1971)

Pope Benedict has certainly committed the church and all theologians to work hard on the Ecology question. He even asked his Council for Justice and Peace to hold a conference on Climate Change. Scientists, environment ministers and leaders of various religions from 20 countries sat down for two days to discuss the implications of global warming and development. The men and women of religion discussed the moral and theological aspects of protecting the environment.

A New Concern

Given the major shift especially for Catholic Moral reflection in the last few years towards a more global ethical reflection not only the field of

justice and peace but also in terms of ecology and climate change, what does this have to say about how we are crafting our moral reflection and our mission and retreat preaching?

A few years ago our moral theologian Brian Johnstone of Australia now teaching in the United States, gave me a paper that he had written on doing moral theology from the perspective of the resurrection. Traditionally we have built our moral reflection on the natural law, the commandment and the precepts of the church. What would a moral theology look like that was based on the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. After all this is the central truth of our faith. What would our evangelization look like if it were to take this central moment of our faith seriously? Would not our preaching be much more inclusive of the reality of the global issues and a move away from personal and private morality? The personal is obviously very important but it does seem to many that the church is too preoccupied with sex and the individual. We are “saved” as a community or faith. Note Matthew 25 in this regard.

Catholic Social Teaching

Edward Schillebeeckx OP wrote: “The hermeneutics of the Kingdom of God exist especially in making the world a better place. Only in this way will we be able to discover what the Kingdom of God really means.”

The best definition of the Kingdom of God found in the scriptures is located in Romans 14:16 – “For the Kingdom of God is not food and drink but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching are all based on the call to recognize Human Dignity and the Dignity and concerns of the planet earth. This is best served when we have a profound respect for life at all levels. The “seamless garment” image of the late Cardinal Bernadin of Chicago expresses this concern well. We are committed to life from womb to tomb and beyond.

In an age of rugged individualism, materialism and militarism especially in the West, the family and social relationships are crucial in the development of the human and a human society. The Family is essential to our social fabric and our relationship to the earth is of the essence. All humans have Rights and Duties and these must be used for the Common Good. (a secular phrase for the Kingdom of God) The Common Good is best served when we have an Option for the Poor and an Option for the Earth. A society is

truly inspired by the Christian Gospel when it cares and sets a priority for the weak, the poor and the marginal. The Earth must be taken seriously in this reflection as it is an example of the weak, the poor and the marginal from so much of our economic and political reflections.

The Principal of Solidarity is an important piece of our work for Evangelization. This principal reminds us “that we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever we live.” Catholic teaching requires us to commit ourselves to the common good. The good of each and every person because we are responsible for all and the earth on which we live.

Stewardship of our earth must be a central theme in our work of evangelization. Our planet earth is our home. Charity begins at home and our first gesture must be the protection and care of our earth and mother nature.

Guide

The Secretariat for Evangelization realizes that for our proclamation to be genuine we firstly must witness in our lives that which we preach in word. To that end we offer the following points as a guide in our preparation for mission and evangelization.

1. **World of Today** – For our Redemptorist work for evangelization to be effective, we must realize and take seriously the forces that are structuring our lives in all parts of our world. The fact of Globalization is a reality affecting lives everywhere. Our world is experiencing violence, acts of terrorism, anger and wars like never before. Modern technology and communication brings these realities into our homes. Fear is experienced throughout the world. Our work of Evangelization must take this modern reality very seriously. The “unholy trinity” of the World Bank, The International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization and the G-8 countries are structuring our world for the betterment of capital and business. In our witness and preaching this reality must be taken very seriously and considered. In the liturgy of the Eucharist we say: “the gifts of the earth and the work of human hands will become for us the body and blood of the lord.” Because of our trade laws we are aborting whole peoples chance to participate in the goods of the earth and the work of human hands. Do we preach about this reality?

2. **Whole Person** – Redemptorist evangelization must attempt to reach the whole person. We must be concerned with the actual realities and lives of our people and the situations in which they find themselves. We need to know well the social sciences especially the insights gleaned from psychology, sociology, anthropology and political science to name but a few.
3. **Extreme Poverty** – Our Redemptorist work has to be concerned about the reality of extreme poverty in our world. It is a crime against humanity that parts of the world live in wealth and other parts are living in abject poverty. Hunger is rampant in parts of Africa and Latin America where we have houses and confreres working. Poverty is the root cause of many human illnesses.
4. **Primary Education** – Universal primary education is a concern of the Redemptorist missionary. To be educated enhances the dignity of the human person. Education opens up possibilities and provides a vision and a dream for the future.
5. **Gender Equality** – The church has not led the way in working for equality among the sexes and supporting the human development of women. This is changing and must. Redemptorists in their lives and work must make sure that women and their concerns are in the forefront of our work and our consciousness.
6. **Child Poverty** – Child poverty is growing worldwide these days. Street children and the trafficking in women and children is a reality that must be made known. Sex tourism is a part of the economies of some countries in which we live and work. The human is exploited. We must work and preach to make this reality known and encourage a political response in our preaching.
7. **Adequate Housing** – The human heart does not bear the Word of God if the person is homeless and on the street. In his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* – Development of Peoples – Pope Paul VI tells us that development is from less to more to most human conditions. It is the life and reality of the whole person that our preaching must concern itself with.
8. **Modern Disease** – The spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria, TB and other diseases must be our concern. Clean drinking water and adequate health care must be a priority for us.
9. **Environmental Sustainability** – There is a paradigm shift from a human centred world to a world where the human is a species among others. Their and our survival depends on our being intimately involved in the protection of the environment.

10. **Global Partnership** – In the rich countries of our Congregation we must preach a message of concern for the development and progress of less fortunate parts of our Redemptorist family. North America and Western Europe must be concerned about the lives and future of peoples in Africa, Latin America and part of Asia.
11. **Arms Trade** – The sale of arms is causing so much hardship and the loss of lives in many parts of our world. Corporations are making monies on the death of the innocent. Redemptorists must speak out about this terrible situation.
12. **Drug Trade** – The drug culture is destroying many in our societies especially the future of the lives of our youngest members. This culture creates an early death for many and a destruction of family and society.
13. **Global Village** – The word of evangelization in one part of the world is intimately connected with the lives of peoples in an other part of the world. Our world today is one global village. We are intimately connected and we must learn to be citizens of the World in which we live and be concerned about the Common Good for all in our human family.
14. **Real World** – The world in which we live and work is the real world of our day. It is of no use to be thinking or wishing for a different one. This is our moment and times and its characteristics and reality must be taken seriously in our preparations for mission, retreats and evangelization.

The General Secretariat for Evangelization has taken very seriously the call for justice within the Congregation itself. We are a global family and in justice, not charity, we must be concerned about the lives of all the members of the Congregation and the situations in which the members live and work. We must support one another, share our resources with one another and hear the call to live simply so that all may live in dignity and integrity.

STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

RESPONSES WITHIN THE CONGREGATION

1. The General Government, in its next Communicanda, might encourage the members to become more aware of and conscious of the realities of poverty, injustice, war, terrorism and ecological problems.

2. The leadership of each Unit, employing Gospel values, will call the members to ongoing conversion by means of retreats and organized conferences; allowing us to be challenged by the reality of the suffering of our confreres and people throughout the world.
3. Each unit, according to their abilities, might organize a particular conference for religious, priests and laity with the goal of reflecting on justice, peace and the environment.
4. We encourage all units to more fully cooperate with the solidarity fund of the Congregation.
5. We encourage our young confreres and students to include in their plan of study a deeper appreciation of the realities of injustice in our world and the many different forms of suffering. Furthermore, we encourage our members to participate in an experience of ministering to the marginalized and disadvantaged; preferably in their pastoral year during their formation.

WIDER RESPONSE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

6. We encourage each unit to have a secretariat or commission for justice, peace and ecology that might co-ordinate this theme of solidarity and promote concrete action so that the units and their members might participate more fully in the transformation of our world. This commission could be integrated into a Secretariat for Evangelization.
7. Where possible, it would be helpful to create or co-operate with an NGO which would allow Redemptorists and lay associates to promote acts of solidarity whose purpose is to create a more just and united world. In the same way, they ought to encourage mutual partnership among parishes and units.
8. Promote in each unit a social program which would channel the concerns and anxieties of many lay people who as volunteers desire to share their time and talent with people who are socially marginalized and poor in more developed countries or in mission countries that need our help and presence.
9. Redemptorists who work in the Southern Hemisphere have a great concern about the lack of primary education, which is crucial for the promotion of human dignity and the struggle against poverty.

10. In the programs of Evangelization and Formation of each unit, there should be a more informed knowledge of modern illnesses like AIDS and concerns for the planet Earth.

11. The General Government by means of the General Secretariat for Evangelization could create a vehicle for co-ordinating requests for social projects and projects of development. This would allow units a means of presenting their various projects. The General Government would then be able to match Units with great need to those who could respond because of their local resources...i.e...Organizations within the Church and the country.