

PREAMBLE

Injustices still disfigure our age. Today the critical social justice issues that confront us in TT/the world are many and varied, as can be seen from the issues that will be addressed by this Commission and its Standing Committees listed hereunder. There can be no neutrality in the face of social injustice – it should be a common concern for all of us. The struggle for social justice is the struggle for an order of life that is founded on real spiritual and moral values.

The resolution by members of Synod 2003 that this Commission be established, and the commitment by His Grace, the Archbishop to act on this resolution, clearly indicate that Catholics in TT are committed to take up Pope Paul VI's challenge: *"If you want peace, work for justice"*.

God is forever calling us to newness of life. We are called to be doers of the Word and not just hearers only. By our actions as Catholics, we are called to be beacons of the Church's pastoral, prophetic and priestly concern for social justice. We are called to give genuine and authentic witness to Christ by the quality of our daily lives. The need for action is also emphasised by Pope John Paul II who said:

"A world of justice and peace cannot be created by words alone and it cannot be imposed by outside forces: it must be desired and must come about through the contribution of all. It is essential for every human being to have a sense of participating, of being a part of the decisions and endeavours that shape the destiny of the world."

In 1971 the Bishops at the World Synod of Bishops stated:

"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."

Here in the Caribbean, the Caribbean Bishops in Justice & Peace in a New Caribbean in 1975 said that the above is the most important sentence in the Bishops' 1971 report and further that:

"The expression of our religious faith must go hand in hand with our active promotion of justice."

The Commission's terms of reference are outlined in its Constitution. The name of the Commission will be its programme. However, in order to outline in more detail the activities of the Commission, this draft action plan and programme of work will be circulated to His Grace, the Archbishop, members of the Commission, Episcopal Vicars, priests, Chairs of other Archdiocesan Commissions/Secretariat, and others for discussion/amendment.

A final document will be produced at a workshop at which Commission members will make inputs to the plan. The final document will be published as soon as possible so that the Commission's work can be facilitated. The plan is based on the Aims of the Commission as outlined in its Constitution. It will not be cast in tablets of stone. Since this will be a working plan, on-going evaluation of the Commission's work may lead to adjustments where necessary.

An action plan will be produced by each Standing Committee (in consultation with relevant individuals/groups) and submitted to His Grace, the Archbishop and to the Commission for approval. These action plans will be informed by the overall plan of the Commission and by the plans of other Synod Commissions/Secretariat.

The vision, values and mission of the Commission will at all times be underpinned by the Biblical concept of Justice and by the Catholic Church's Social Teaching. The Church's teachings on social justice deal with establishing, maintaining and promoting right relationships between persons and the common good of peoples, societies and the entire earth. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* sees the struggle for justice as a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel, and *Justice in the World* takes this to its logical conclusion by committing the Church to a preferential option for the poor, and to practising poverty and justice within its own structures.

The promotion of greater equality of opportunity for all will be fundamental to the Commission's commitment to building a just and inclusive society/world. This means that, inter alia, equal opportunities principles, strategies and practices relating to, for example, race, gender, class, disability and age, will be integrated into the everyday work of the Commission and its Standing Committees.

In the Hebrew scriptures, God's covenant with humankind calls people to live in "right relationship" with God, self, others, and creation. This summarises the Biblical sense of both justice and holiness of life; God's people are to be holy like their God in their relationships with each other (see Lev. 19:2-35), and especially by imitating God's special favour for those to whom life is most denied, for example, the poor and the marginalised (see Jer.7:6, etc).

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus announces his life and mission as fulfillment of the most radical social innovation of his Jewish tradition – the jubilee Year of Isaiah 61:1-2, a promise of "good news to the poor," "release to the captives," "sight to the blind," and "to let the oppressed go free" (see Lk. 4:18-19). Catholicism appropriates this Biblical mandate of justice with a distinctive accent, namely, a dual commitment to the dignity of the person and to the common good of all. This is reflected in its description of "basic justice" as commutative (one on one), distributive (group to person), and social (person to group). Justice, therefore, is clearly a biblical mandate.

St Thomas Aquinas defines the virtue of justice as a constant and perpetual will to render to everyone his/her due. It is therefore a virtue that resides in the will and regulates those duties which we are strictly bound to discharge towards our neighbour.

The virtue of Justice has to do with rights and obligations that flow from them. Blessed Pope John XXIII in his encyclical, *Pacem in Terris* (1963), calls these rights “inalienable” and “inviolable” rights. The source of these rights – they are natural rights which flow from the very nature of humankind. The ultimate foundation of human rights is God.

Catholics, therefore, cannot afford to treat social justice questions as peripheral to the Good News. Since commitment to social justice lies at the heart of Christian Witness, we must connect biblical principles to our everyday lives and work.

To promote effectiveness, efficiency and economy, the Commission will need to forge partnerships across national and local government services, parishes/communities, other Archdiocesan Commissions/Secretariat, businesses, and organisations concerned with social justice

Social justice witness is not the responsibility of the Commission only but is seen as permeating the life of every Catholic in the Archdiocese who should respond to the Micah 6:8 imperative to “*act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God*”.

The success of the Commission’s work will depend, to a large extent, on the effectiveness of its collaborative work with, inter alia, the Vicar of each Vicariate and with priests, religious, ecclesial communities, Public Associations of Christ’s Faithful, and laity across the Archdiocese, NGOs, CBOs, representatives from Government Departments and Local Government. The Commission’s role will include guiding and resourcing the Church to more fully live out its commitment to social justice.

There is a need for our local Church to actively bear witness to a concern for social justice, not only locally and nationally but internationally so that as Christians we can stand in solidarity with those who are the victims of injustice.

We are bound together by our common humanity. The mystery of human solidarity and interdependence is such that whenever one human being is made to suffer the rest of humanity suffers too and is weakened and threatened. Martin Luther King Jr. said: “*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.*”

One of the major roles of the Commission would be to awaken the consciences of the 300,000 or more Catholics in T&T by constantly asking the questions: “Are we a rock of support that victims of injustice can rely upon in their struggle against injustice? Are we listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying about social injustice in our nation and in the world today?”

Oscar Romero stated:

“The Church would betray its own love for God and its fidelity to the gospel if it stopped being...a defender of the rights of the poor...a humaniser of every legitimate struggle to achieve a more just society...that prepares the way for the true reign of God in history.”

Our present Pope, John Paul II, has stressed the need for solidarity between rich and poor nations. He wrote:

“Solidarity helps us to see the ‘other’ – whether a person, people or nation – not just as some kind of instrument with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited...but as our ‘neighbour’, a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which we are all equally invited by God. Hence the importance of reawakening the religious awareness of individuals and peoples.”

Both Pope Paul VI, in *Populorum Progressio, on the Development of Peoples*, and John Paul II have applied this standard to international cooperation in authentic social and economic development. John Paul II writes:

“another name for peace is development. Just as there is a collective responsibility for avoiding war, so too there is a collective responsibility for promoting development.”

Pope Paul VI believed that progressive development must be a holistic enterprise that nurtures each human being in his/her entirety - socially, economically, culturally, politically, educationally, morally, spiritually, physically and so on.

The gospel vision of justice as the one table of the Lord is more relevant than ever. Each one of us in T&T must be seen as a responsive and generous member of the one human family.

The objectives outlined below highlight the fact that there is a need for a multi-faceted approach to addressing issues of social injustice in our Archdiocese/the world. Inevitably some of the challenges facing the Commission will be remedied quickly while others will require a long haul. And since it would not be possible to address all areas of work at the same time, due to limited resources and so on, phased implementation would be important. Close collaboration with the Post-Synod implementation team, the Process Team, and other Commissions and Secretariats in the Archdiocese will be crucial.

Conclusion

There is a saying that: “Vision with action CAN change the world.” This draft paper seeks to provide a “vision” and an urgent task for the Commission and its Standing Committees. All concerned will need to contribute to this paper and take ownership of the “final” document that is produced after consultation with His Grace, the Archbishop, members of the Commission, Episcopal Vicars, priests and others. The response of every Catholic in support of the Commission’s work can be summed up in the words of the late Cardinal Hume:

“Our Christian responses can be summed up in three words: ‘Prayer, Faith and Action’ – none sufficient on its own, each incomplete without the others.” (Letter to priests in Westminster Diocese 1979)

There are over 300,000 Catholics in T&T and over 1.3 billion Catholics in the world today. As His Grace said at the opening Mass of the Synod, we are “the living stones”. We must ensure that there is some visible and credible sign that Catholics are living and working in T&T and in the world at large.

If each one of us acts as leaven in the mass, together we can be a social conscience, a moral force, a source of inspiration, hope and empowerment. Then, together, we will truly be building God’s Kingdom here on earth. We can and should be more prophetic, more demanding, less compromising.

Let us remember the words of St Teresa of Avila who said:

“Christ has no body but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.”

And we must remember that together we must walk with the two feet of justice – Works of Mercy and Works of Social Action. As Pope Pius XI stated in Divini Redemptoris, #49:

“Charity will never be true charity unless it takes justice into account...Let no one attempt with small gifts of charity to exempt themselves from the great duties imposed by justice.”

This does not mean that we should not be engaged in works of Charity. It is worth reflecting on the words of Mother Teresa, who, when questioned about how to help those in need, simply used to say:

“ What you can do, I can’t do, and what I can do, you can’t do, but together we can do something beautiful for God.”

There is a saying that other voices may fade away but Catholic voices must never fade away. Our aim must be to learn to do better that which we must never cease from doing.

His Grace has suggested in the Catholic News of 16.3.03 that, following the Synod, we should all use the following as our motto: **“The way forward together”**.

Thus, as heralds of our faith, we will go forward together to build God’s kingdom of Truth, Justice, Peace, Love and freedom here on Earth.