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The Christian Parish

9. Social Justice on the Quiet

I

Suppose you met someone shivering on a cold day because he had few clothes on and was hungry besides. You passed him by but not before saying, "Hey, there, get some warm clothes on and get a dinner somewhere"—but provided neither. What would you think of that situation? Or suppose you went to a meeting and while there two women came in, the one gorgeously dressed and obviously well bred and the other poorly dressed and looking just this side of the cleaning woman. You said to the well dressed lady, "Come here and have a seat," and to the shabby woman, "You go and stand in the corner somewhere." What would you think of that?

We would probably react with mild outrage at the anomaly of the situation and remark how un-Christian such responses were. The more perceptive among us might recognize the two cases as literally taken from the examples found in chapter 2 of St. James' epistle. All of us would sense that there is more to the Christian life than words: deeds are needed as well. And when deeds are done for and with our needy brother and sister from faith, from the demands of the gospel, we have Christian social justice. Nothing could be more simple. On the contrary.

When we come to speak of our fourth foundation of the creative parish, social justice, nothing could be more complicated. And the complication is a peculiarly pastoral one.

It is not that the scripture is not clear. In Matthew 25 we will awesomely be judged according to how we fed, clothed, and visited the least of the brethren. St. John asks us, "How can God's love survive in a man who has enough of this world's goods yet closes his heart to his brother when he sees him in need?" (1 Jn 3:17); and he goes on to lecture us by saying, "little children, let us love in deed and truth and not merely talk about it. . . . one who has no love for the brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen" (1 Jn 3:18; 4:20). There are hundreds of examples in scripture that speak to us of social justice.

It is not that church teaching is not clear. In modern times, from the pioneering encyclical of Leo XIII in 1890 to that of Pope John Paul II in 1979, *The Redeemer of the Human Race*, the church has consistently reminded its members that faith requires those actions which redress wrongs and assist the unfortunate and oppressed. In Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* we read of "the birth of a new humanism, one in which man is defined primarily in terms of his responsibility for his brothers and for history" (n. 55); that Christians are called upon to "give witness of a living and mature faith . . . including its worldly dimensions, and by activating him toward justice and love, especially regarding the needy" (n. 21); that "the expectation of a new earth must not weaken, but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one" (n. 39). Most postconciliar documents have developed these same themes, such as the now famous Latin American Medellin documents of 1968 and the International Synod of Bishops of 1971 which reminded us that "unless the Christian message of love and justice

shows its effectiveness through action in the cause of justice in the world, it will only with difficulty gain credibility with the men of our times. 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."

There is no ambiguity as to where the church stands on social justice.

It is not that the needs are not clear. We speak today of the Third World countries where the per capita national output is less than two thousand dollars a year, or what is termed a relatively low "physical quality of life" (Overseas Development Council's phrase). We now even speak of Fourth World countries, the poorest of the poor, whose per capita national output is less than three hundred dollars annually. Those figures mean nothing to us, but the cries of this man who has climbed up to the colossal statue of Christ of Corcovado do: "I have climbed up to you, Christ, from the filthy, confined quarters down there, with their stench of urine and typhoid fever, to put before you most respectfully these considerations: there are nine hundred thousand of us down there in the slums of that splendid city and the number keeps increasing. . . . And you, Christ, do you permit things like that? Why? Did you not come to help the world? . . . Christ do not remain here at Corcovado surrounded by divine glory. Go down there into the *favelas*. Come with me into the *favelas* and live with us down there. Don't stay away from us; live among us and give us new faith in you and in the Father. Amen."¹ Or we may be moved by the description of a man who has not studied poverty but who has lived it. Being poor, he says:

- Is witnessing the agony on your mother's face as she places hot cloths on your belly to quiet the hunger pains.
- It's watching your illiterate father succumb to alcohol because he is not equipped mentally or physically to raise seven children.
- It is stealing potatoes from the school cafeteria so that the family can eat supper that night.
- It is being put to bed early on Christmas Eve because there are no toys and no food.
- It is having your childhood's only birthday cake made without sugar or shortening.
- It is being called to the school cafeteria where your younger brother has falsely sworn that he brought vegetables from home in exchange for a hot lunch, and both you and he being brought to tears by a lecture on why children should never lie, and being sent back to your classroom without food.
- It's selling a dozen eggs needed by the family because you cannot bear the shame of not bringing your share of soft drinks for the school picnic.
- It is eating flour and meal mixed and cooked with hot pepper so that you won't eat too much.
- It's having your brother and sister drop out of the third grade because she doesn't have a dress and he is being laughed at for wearing a shortened version of your mother's tattered old coat.²

And this testimony comes from a man in our own United States.

It is not that cosmic issues are not clear. Military activity and the arms race devastate not only our material planet but the people on it as well. Every year, for example, massive diversion of resources into military ends and activities

absorb about two-thirds of the gross national product of the poorer half of the world's population. Every year the world spends about 350 billion dollars for military purposes thus diverting needed money from social problems. Exports of major weapons to developing countries rose from 3 billion in 1970 to 7.3 billion in 1976. In short, one out of every six tax dollars is spent by the military to wage or prepare for war, yet most of the world is wanting the necessities of life. Here are words, all the more remarkable considering their source, from former U.S. Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara: "Malnutrition saps their energy, stunts their bodies, and shortens their lives. Illiteracy darkens their minds and forecloses their futures. Preventable diseases maim and kill their children. Squalor and ugliness pollute and poison their surroundings. We are not talking about merely a tiny minority of unfortunates, a regrettable but insignificant exception to the rule, but forty percent of the total population of one hundred countries."

Money diverted from their mouths into arms is an abuse that cries to heaven. That is why a Vatican statement to the United Nations on May 7, 1976 "condemned unreservedly" the arms race as an "act of aggression, which amounts to a crime, for . . . by their cost alone, armaments kill the poor by causing them to starve."

There is, then, no lack of clarity: scripture, the church, the needs, the issues are all there, open, apparent, observable to all. There is no doubt as to either the existence of social injustices that must be righted or the mandate we have to do so. There is no doubt about the guidance and the principles scripture and the church give us. There is no doubt, above all, about the urgency. Yet, there is the peculiar pastoral problem we have: why are we so uninformed and why are we so unmoved? Why do questions of social justice never appear on our adult education agendas

and never spoken of from the pulpit? Why are we indifferent to social justice?

2

In seeking answers to these questions we come face to face with an unnerving irony: as far as social issues go, there are in fact several moral stances that members of the church are widely expected to know and to take—and for the most part do. Mostly such issues touch on family morality: abortion, divorce, euthanasia, and religious education. All Catholics are expected to agree on these matters, more or less, and they are issues persistently advertised, taught, discussed, and preached. Yet, oddly, Catholics are expected to have divergent views on the morality of war, racism, the arms trade, and aid to poor countries. And these issues are *not* advertised, taught, discussed, or preached. They are *not* alive for the average parish; they are nonissues, these incredibly profound questions which more than anything else on earth will determine our lives and alter our lifestyles. There is a virtual conspiracy of silence. As the King of Siam says, "It is a puzzlement!" Such a puzzlement is expressed in a summary statement of the general debate on the 1971 Synod of Bishops, and it is a real cry of frustration:

How is it, after eighty years of modern social teaching and two thousand years of the gospel of love, that the church has to admit her inability to make more impact on the conscience of her people? . . . The faithful, and particularly the wealthy and more comfortable among them, simply do not see structural injustice as a sin, simply feel no obligation to do anything about it. . . . Sunday observance and the church's rules on sex

and marriage tend to enter the Catholic consciousness profoundly as sin. But to live like Dives with Lazarus at the gate is not even conceived as sinful.

Where do we find answers to the discrepancy of the clear call of the church and the clear deafness of her people? How do we alert indifferent parishes to a critical dimension of their lives? We might begin as we should: by not presuming pastorally that such unconcern is due to a real lack of good will. The people are not to be castigated nor confronted with issues they are not able to handle. Perhaps the first step for a parish is to try to see the hidden reasons buried in its heritage that might account for the indifference and moral lopsidedness we all have. Some speculations—they are only that—are offered here.

1. *Social justice became categorized as somehow less "spiritual" and therefore less worthy of our attention.* Behind this statement lies a distinct Catholic interpretation of faith. For many centuries faith was seen primarily in intellectual terms, in terms of understanding (Anselm's "faith seeking understanding") and enlightenment. With this accent on faith as an illumination of the mind and the enlightened mind's assent to truth, then two results followed: first, the mind was seen as the "higher" part of man and the body "lower." It was a dualism that naturally tended to center on the soul alone and intellectual truth. It was a dualism that made faith a vertical projection of the mind and a kind of practicing for the Beatific Vision. It certainly had the tendency to take the focus off this evil world and its problems. Secondly, such a view of a faith that emphasized the mind's assent to truth did not necessarily carry with it any imperative to move into action, to *do* something.

The Protestant version of faith was no social improvement either. It tended to see faith as a trust between the

person and God. People in this tradition tended to develop so intense a personal and devotional life that nothing could disturb them. No adverse circumstance was going to shake their trust in the Lord. As a matter of fact, the more injustice there was in the world, the more the faithful person turned inward to find comfort and security in Jesus. The net result of this view of faith was that if everything was so fully in the hands of God then the human equation in relieving the world's needs and answering the call of social justice is minimal if not absent altogether.

No wonder that at this juncture in our history both Catholic and Protestant theologians have come to the conclusion "that there seems to be something wrong with any theory that plays off God against all human and created agencies, so that trust in him involves a lack of trust in them."³ Nevertheless the harm has been done and has left us with an indifference to social justice. A faith that relies solely on total trust in God is short on interest and one that defines itself as an assent to truth is short on action—and both have given rise to Marx's indictment that "religion is the opium of the people," lulling them to heavenly visions while the earth burns.

In this connection it is worth noting that, because they tend to hold these old views of faith to an extreme degree, evangelicals, Pentecostals, and charismatics are noticeably lacking in social sensitivity and social programs. They are far into the "Jesus and Me" syndrome. Recently there are signs that this lack has disturbed some of the leaders of these movements, and they are now trying to turn the picture around, but the road to awareness will be hard. Some time ago, for example, a newspaper article cited the anxiety of the professors of a well-known theological university whose students were unwilling to read since Jesus was enough for them. More recently, another article from

a teacher told of her disenchantment with her bright twenty-year-old student who was "born again," and "since that day nine months ago, she has been off heroin and high on Jesus. She tells me that once you've found the Lord, you need look no further. Maybe that's why she got a D on the midterm . . . she stopped looking . . . It's all so simple, really. Acquire the Lord and live in a state of grace. What need is there to trouble with inquiry and scholarship? . . . Life becomes easier when you know at least God loves you, that he cares whether you pass the course, and that all you need do is call on him and he will, in his infinite wisdom, provide the answers on the final exam." The teacher is not being sarcastic, but perplexed and concerned that that kind of "faith" has absolved her student from contact with the real world. This is the kind of incident that gives us a clue as to why we have not traditionally reacted to social questions. The definition of faith we were trained in gave us reasons not to. The "head and heart" trip took us off course from the world.

As an aside here, we can appreciate the whole new axis of faith that the so-called liberation theology has tried to devise; for these South American theologians know what it is to live many centuries in suppressed acquiescence in the name of the Lord. They see that a faith that does not relate to action is bankrupt and plays into the hands of the oppressors. Redemption, in their eyes, cannot be separated from social, economic, and political factors. They are talking about St. Paul's "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6), a faith that does not intend to protect us from the world but to remake the world. There are real criticisms of liberation theology, but Avery Dulles, who himself offers some trenchant ones, is right when he says that the liberation theologians reworking of faith is to be praised for its de-

mand that all Christians take seriously the obligation to work for a better political and social order.

But we don't want to get too far afield. We return to our first point: former definitions of faith tended to produce a tradition of "angelism"; that is, that somehow we were at our best when we were like angels: pure minds which gave assent to truth. Therefore only things of the mind were considered spiritual enough for consideration. Things of the body: food, housing, freedom, clothing, and employment were far too mundane to take seriously for a people whose faith was an interior assent, not an exterior messing around with a world that was not going to last anyway. With this understanding of faith, then, it stood to reason that "the church should not get involved in politics."

2. *Our Catholic American experience has left us socially timid.* Anyone who knows our history knows that Catholics entered the country as aliens to the Protestant ruling majority; that they initially were not allowed to hold public office, buy property, or even settle in most of the colonies. There is a long history of Know-Nothingism, the Ku Klux Klan, and the American Protective Association that tells of long-standing antipathy towards Catholics right up to the contemporary climate that makes "anti-Catholicism the anti-Semitism of the liberals." The Protestant Crusade has left its mark which even the election of the first Catholic president has not erased. Such a history has united strange humanistic bedfellows who have formed coalitions against what they conceive to be Catholic power. Ethical and social issues are always open for discussion and legislative political maneuvering—unless the Catholic church is involved as a moral presence or advocate. The issues automatically become "religious" ones thereby provoking the unanswerable challenge of violation of the separation of church and

state. All of this has had the net effect of a loss of confidence for Catholics on the one hand, and, on the other, of trying to prove how American they are by not being united on any issue. The collective conscience and awareness have been intimidated and, as a consequence, large social issues do not find soil for discussion in Catholic parishes.

3. *Secularism's triumph has segregated religion into another sphere.* As our society grows more and more secular, as high specializations abound and the legitimacy of secular efforts and beliefs are rightly acknowledged and honored, then religion is inadvertently pushed into the periphery of political and economic spheres. A world increasingly autonomous from religious influence feels it does not need any church to look over its shoulder or interfere. The result is, as one writer puts it, that "the legitimate autonomy of the political arena, expressed in the principles of religious liberty and separation of church and state, raises serious questions about the possibility of common Christian action for justice."⁴ This kind of political atmosphere is also likely to inhibit any sure and certain plunge into questions of social justice.

4. *Contemporary complexity makes any parish hesitate.* Social issues are not simple today, if they ever were. They involve global circumstances and technology so complex, refined, tangled, and rarified that even the so-called experts are baffled or confused. Data is so incredibly complex that it confounds even our computers. Life is not so intimately joined on all levels that no one can see and assess it all. Large corporations, world banks, governments, industry are so vast and their power so great that the average person cannot understand or cope. Perspective is hard to get and a certain and sure answer, unanimously grasped and taught, is hard come by. We have moved too far and too fast for simple answers:

In his struggle to know, to control, and to direct his natural environment — earth, water, and air; cold, heat, and energy; plants and animals; distance and time — Western man created, step by accelerating step, a new social environment: from hunting bands, nomadic tribes, farming villages, city-states, nations, and feudal empires he moved to multinational economic and political bodies and blocs; from barter and simple markets to commercial partnerships, stock companies, legal contracts, trade agreements, cooperatives and industrial corporations, banks, insurance and pension funds, stock exchanges; from yeomanry and artisan guilds to labor unions. . . . Today's householder no longer wrestles in heroic solitary struggle via windmill, well, and campfire, with water, draughts and darkness, cold and heat. He deals rather with the local utility company, which deals with labor unions, environment, and planning boards, federal rate and energy commissions; and they in turn with multinational corporations, OPEC, and eventually with the Arab League and the United Nations. To get meat and milk, potatoes and transport, the family no longer trails deer and digs the soil, corrals cattle and lassos horses. They drive to the supermarket and call up the airline, which in turn bargain with General Foods and General Motors, the Farm Bureau, and Farm Workers, the Federal Aviation Authority, congressional committees, White House staff, and Madison Avenue.⁵

If such is the ordinary, commonplace complexity of our daily lives, who has the boldness to make positive statements about political and social justice and where in fact such justice really lies? Not that we are without principles or genuine help or clear church teaching; it's just that global complexity gives us pause even with these.

5. *Fear of being considered radical or alienating.* Insistent social sermons will provoke and alienate many. There are all kinds of liberals and conservatives in any congregation

who will take different interpretations from what is said. Experiences have often proven bitter in the Vietnam war when peace signatures were sought in church vestibules causing nasty confrontations between Catholic hawks and doves. People tend to feel that they come to church on Sundays to be comforted not confronted, and certainly not to be exposed to some "liberal" priest's politics with no chance for public rebuttal. Few clergy therefore are willing to split their congregations right down the middle with statements that unfairly may align them with Ronald Reagan or Jane Fonda. It is this fear of being considered radical or the pastoral fear of becoming ineffective by alienating his people that keeps social issues, except in general terms, absent from the pulpit. Courage is surely needed, but the courage that leads not destroys, and sometimes it's hard to tell the difference.

6. *The church itself may be a part of the problem.* We come from an old European heritage of church power, wealth, status, and leadership. We have been aligned both in Europe and in America and elsewhere with current political structures and have often benefited from them. This has led us into the habit of not questioning the social system that has been to our benefit or looking into social matters which might backlash and force us to make fundamental changes. Our credibility has not always been firm and to take a strong stand will mean more than words; it must mean a radical alteration of our own lifestyles and church structures. A cardinal of Bolivia was right when he said, "the church could possess her wealth and her territory in the past with a quiet conscience, but today, in face of hunger and deprivation of so many people, this can no longer be done without sin."⁶ We remain a part of the problem and prophetically inhibited until church policies and structures and the lifestyles of clergy and reli-

gious take the lead in living social justice, not in writing about it. It is one of the contemporary glories of the South American church, so long on the side of oppressive dictatorships and a debilitating status quo, that it has thrown itself in word and action squarely on the side of the poor and oppressed. It has begun its prophetic action for social justice and so can freely give sermons on it. Until we act in like manner, our silence betrays, not a lack of clear principles to declare, but a lack of heart to live, social justice.

7. *Finally, we have been raised with a domesticated liturgy.* Here we share the thoughts of an interesting meeting held at Notre Dame in June of 1979. It seemed an innocent enough meeting for it was the Eighth Annual Conference for Pastoral Liturgy. One would think that the discussions would center around singing or rubrics or how to celebrate, but not this time. The theme was on "Service: Community Prayer and Community Justice." The interesting thing was that the scholars there received the same treatment as any parish priest would have expected had he preached on the same subject: fewer people came, the mood was tepid and some even walked out at a talk by Father Dan Berrigan. Nevertheless the participants boldly went on demonstrating through theology and scripture, the intimate connection between community justice and worship. They said that our liturgy and our theology are too tame, too ivy towered and must be brought down into real life in a world that is hungry, oppressed, and enslaved.

Still, that old pastorally sensitive point kept coming up in the get-togethers afterwards and in the public question sessions: how do we respond to the needs of social justice and at the same time not alienate our congregations? How do we get beyond a liturgy that makes people feel good and affirms them, but leaves them without a challenge to feed the hungry and visit the sick? How can the liturgy

overcome the social apathy of the parish? Everyone agreed that social justice should be integrated into the liturgy, but no one could answer how. Everyone admitted the tension, the problem. As one said:

If I mount the pulpit with scripture alone in my hands, if I limit my preaching to the broad biblical imperatives, if I simply repeat scriptural slogans like "man does not live by bread alone"; "My peace I give to you"; "Seek first the kingdom of God"; "Love your neighbor as yourself"; "Wives, be subject to your husband"; then hungry stomachs will stay bloated, the arms race will escalate, dissidents will rot in political prisons, blacks will return to their slavery, and women will continue to be second-class citizens in much of the world. After all, it is not only the heathen who are responsible for oppression. The oppressors, large and small, often break the eucharistic bread with us.⁷

Yet, even after saying this, the speaker came back to the question of how can one preach all this without offending the people. How forceful and concrete dare we be?

These are some of the reasons why we do not deal at all or comfortably with social justice in our parishes. The reasons show us how we acquired an almost ingrained resistance to overt reminders of the world's distress or social confrontations. Besides, we all have to deal with our own pressured world of shrinking dollar, cut backs, less energy, unemployment, and recession. Yet all of this does not negate the fact that we are the minority haves in a world of majority have nots. It does not negate the fact that, with so essential a gospel imperative to care for our brothers and sisters, the question of social justice must be faced by any parish worth its sacramental sign of the compassionate Christ.

It would seem that we are faced with a dilemma: we admit that social justice is a foundation for the creative parish—it's too fundamentally gospel not to be—and we admit that to get it going is difficult. How do we proceed? Outside of becoming a disturbing (and disturbed) revolutionary, the priest and lay leaders can work out some broad structures that may begin to sensitize the people and give an unmistakable tone to the parish as one which cares. Four are suggested here.

Encourage emphatic but nonthreatening programs. For example, powerful visuals hung around church or hall now and then can provoke subliminal interest and compassion. On the last Sunday of the month have a food collection. Place some tables in the sanctuary and have the people place food packages there before Mass—including such needed goods as paper towels, diapers, napkins, and cleaning aids. Families might encourage their children to prepare the bags and actually do the placing in the sanctuary. Senior citizens days of recollection followed by a parish dinner and entertainment, hosted by the teenagers, can give another dimension to the lives of both. Clothing drives, communal anointings, adopting Vietnamese families or assisting the Boat People are all legitimate ways that any parish can use to reach out to the less fortunate. These things are not handling the root of the problems, but they are social services that can sensitize some people who might want to tackle that later. One further suggestion concerns the children. Most parishes have children's envelopes whether they have a school or not; and the total sum of these does not really amount to that much on a given Sunday. It would be a good teaching lesson in social

justice if the parish would announce that from henceforth the money from the children's envelopes will never be used for the parish itself but rather will be diverted into some formal organized charity such as Bread for the World. (Bread for the World will send acknowledgement and thank you letters which might be then shared with the parish.) Then at the end of each month have the children themselves open, calculate, and deposit the money before it is sent away. It is not much, but it is meaningful and helps towards alerting young minds to their needy peers throughout the world. Again, it is not this or that program that says it all; it is simply the power of their cumulative effect to raise consciousness.

Form and publicly recognize new parish organizations that cater to social needs. Some parishes have a Vincent de Paul society or the Knights of Columbus; they may be flourishing or inactive. In any case, new styles for service are needed and new names. Two suggestions come to mind. One is what might be called the Samaritan Ministry. Here men and women, on behalf of the parish community, care for and assist those in need. This may be a question of bringing communion to the shut-ins or those in the hospital or nursing homes or riding them to clinics or doctor's appointments. What marks them off from general goodwill activities is their life of prayer, their communal sharing, their study and their willingness to engage in a ministry of healing prayer. Another might be called the Lazarus Ministry. Some parishes have made the decision to let their churches be open for wakes. The body is brought to the church the evening before and then the Mass of Christian burial is celebrated on the next morning at the regular community Mass. The Lazarus Ministry assists in the arrangements and provides for the physical needs and comfort of the family and visitors. There are as many sug-

gestions as creative ideas. Again, the point is an official sensitizing for many people to the needs of others.

Restore the sacraments as prophetic signs. Sacraments are signs, symbols of greater realities and are at the heart of the church's life as a worshiping community. The sacraments, as communal actions, touch the head and the heart and have the power to inspire social activity if properly explained and celebrated. The symbol of each sacrament points beyond the sanctuary to the world. Baptism, after all, is not just for the members of the church but is a sign of that grace that God holds out for all. The eucharist shows the radical source of unity of all people for as the bread is made up of many grains brought together so is the community; and, likewise, as bread reaches its highest purpose and function when it is broken and distributed, so does the community. The sacrament of reconciliation by its very nature speaks of a wholeness for the hungry, the sick, and the needy. Confirmation tells of charismatic concern for and service to others; witnessing in word and in deed is its chief characteristic and its underlying social thrust. The sacrament of the sick proclaims healing to a fractured people within and without the community; it celebrates in a special way also all those who care for the sick and who minister to them.

Matrimony and holy orders, above all, are *the* social sacraments not merely because they deal with human relationships but because they deal with them in the faith terms of tolerance, forgiveness, caring, and growth. So there is a profound social relevance to all of the sacraments, and the wise parish loses no opportunity both to teach and to celebrate them in such a context.

The point made about the eucharist being a source of unity and sharing among all people was emphasized particularly by the last International Eucharistic Congress

which had as its motto: "The Eucharist and the Hungers of the Human Family." And the book by theologian Monika Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*,⁸ again underlines this theme. These broader themes can be found in a fuller theology of the parish; as such they can be pastorally explored as a means to sensitizing people to the awareness that the story of Dives and Lazarus is more than a parable: it is both invitation and judgment.

Promote an actual social ministry in the parish. Going the route of a social ministry enables the parish to deal with smaller groups who hopefully might influence the larger congregation. What is involved here is more than social service as described above. This has a more formal and more professional thrust. The members are expected to study and get proper formation and understand not only the large issues but the best tactics for achieving a just society. Social ministry in this context is "primarily concerned with the development (training, enabling, energizing, motivating, empowering) of the people doing the action."⁹ And the key concept here, of course, is not that such social ministers are trained to do a social action *for* someone but *with* someone so that he or she learns how to meet and improve a situation. The focus here is not to overthrow by revolution an existing institution or compete with it by establishing a substitute system, but to change and reform it so that it is more just. The problem often is that the system itself is defective and even perhaps immoral, not the people involved who may not even be aware of the system's built-in justices. The system itself must be transformed in the light of the gospel.

A case in point here was the unusual pastoral letter written by the Catholic bishops of the chronically poor Appalachian region of our country. The bishops asked why the people of Appalachia were always oppressed. When

the mines were working and they had jobs, they were exploited. When the mines were shut down they were unemployed. When the mines reopened their plight was the same. The bishops went out of their way to insist that the problem does not necessarily lie in the lack of generosity of the more successful people or the ill will of those who run the large corporation. Rather what is evident here is the root evil in the system itself. Built into it are principles that will always hurt the workers no matter what and that must be changed. For instance, the bishops pointed out two operating principles in the system that are insensitive to the workers. The first they mentioned is "technological rationalization" which means that all ways of efficiency and planning are explored to get maximum effort. Each factor is scientifically examined to get a better operation going—every factor except the people. Decisions concerning them are made as if they were things, inanimate pieces of the overall corporate machinery. Technological rationalization is constituted in the very soul of the system and it must change so that people too are an essential and alive consideration in decision making. This technological rationalization is the same thing as Lionel Rubinoff's "functional rationality": "Here all quality is translated into quantity. Here the human being is dissolved into needs and wants. Here people tend to become objects, appear as items in an inventory, and serve the needs and efficiency of the system. The solution of functional problems dominates over the fate of individuals."¹⁰

The second operating principle to the harm of the people, the bishops pointed out, is the "maximization of profit" as the *only* consideration in decision making. This is not greed operating or heartlessness. It is just that this maximization of profit is the sole factor that determines what happens in the corporation; it excludes any consider-

ation of the human equation. It is these two principles, the bishops argue, not some monstrous corporate Simon Legree, that cause grief to the people of Appalachia. Until the system itself is reformed and transformed the people's plight will never be improved. Social ministries can be trained to deal with such things and act on them in concert with people of good will who are seeking social justice. It is hoped that their witness, blessed and supported by the parish, will bring to the attention of the congregation a dimension that might otherwise be too sensitive to broach consistently or too distant to be noticed.

It is recommended, of course, that preachers do get bolder and preach more often than they do now on such pressing issues without offense or accusation. There may be more avenues of a more direct approach in those parishes which have kind of taken a one note stand or a central theme stand. For example, some parishes gear their whole lifestyle to the new rite of adult Christian initiation with all of its ramifications. Some parishes are styled charismatic. Those parishes so tied into a central notion might be experiments to watch in the area of social justice.¹¹

4

We conclude this part which has dealt with the four foundations of the creative parish: ministry, spirituality, scope, and social justice. These four foundations are hardly complete or exclusive. They do, however, provide some signs of what a creative parish might look like and what it might deal with. They give a direction for the parish that is aware that Christ is ever incarnated anew in every place where "those who know" form the church. They are principles, not programs, that should help the

parish that is a sacrament to be as authentic as it can be. The next and final part turns to the personal experience of one parish to see how such principles might be translated, to an experiment in pastoral theology.

Notes for Chapter 9

1. Quoted in Walbert Buhlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church*, (Orbis Books, 1977), p. 125.
2. Words of J. Carl Cook in a radio broadcast, quoted in *National Catholic Reporter* (June 15, 1979), p. 14. For a penetrating film on the horrendous crises that face underdeveloped countries see *Five Minutes to Midnight* (World Focus Ltd., London).
3. Avery Dulles, "The Meaning of Faith Considered in Relationship to Justice" in *The Faith That Does Justice*, ed. John C. Haughey (Paulist Press, 1977), p. 28.
4. David Hollenbach, "A Prophetic Church and the Catholic Sacramental Imagination," in *ibid.*, p. 237.
5. Joseph Gremillon, *The Gospel of Peace and Justice* (Orbis Books, 1976), pp. 25, 26. This whole book is a real compendium of social insights and contains the major encyclicals and postconciliar documents.
6. Quoted in Buhlmann, *Third Church*, p. 121.
7. Walter Burghardt, quoted in *A.D. Correspondence* (July 14, 1979). For another expression of the dilemma see "Of Many Things," *America* (July 21, 1979).
8. Monika Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World* (Paulist Press, 1976).
9. Harry Fagan, *Empowerment* (Paulist Press, 1979), p. 10. An excellent how-to booklet, full of common and gospel sense for any starting social ministry program.
10. Lionel Rubinoiff, quoted in Gregory Baum, *The Social Imperative* (Paulist Press, 1979), p. 55. See also David Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition* (Paulist Press, 1979).
11. For an article that tries to come to terms with world issues on the parish level, see Francis X. Meehan and William Mattia, "The Arms Race and the American Parish," *America* (September 22, 1979).