

Tim Duffy: Justice and Peace in Scotland

'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36)

Justice and Peace Scotland was formed in 1979, shortly after the accession of Pope John Paul II; and the accession of Margaret Thatcher as UK Prime Minister. From the moment she arrived on the steps of Downing Street, quoting the 'prayer of St Francis', she served as a role model - in reverse. Every policy, whether of work or unemployment, defence and nuclear weapons, increasing inequality and poverty, foreign relations with unsavoury regimes like South Africa, as well as a disregard for the effects of these policies on people, gave Justice and Peace an agenda of opposition. Mrs Thatcher was someone who thought that the Good Samaritan could only be compassionate because he could afford the cost of a place at the inn.

Over the years the issues changed but the root problems remained the same. These can usefully be understood under the terms hegemony or domination (*vorherrschaft*). I mean the attempt, not only to assert dominance for a particular economic, political or cultural ideology; but the attempts to get those who are subject to the domination to collaborate by accepting it. The resulting worldview is seen as natural, normative and beneficial for everyone, rather than as artificial social constructs that benefit only the ruling class.

Undeniably, Scotland and each of the countries here can point to their own culture (or more probably cultures) which form the basis of our personal and social interactions. Yet even those designations of 'country' or 'nation' are social constructs which are themselves the current balance and historical residue of dominant hegemonies.

These days, 'nationalism' tends to be a bad word, with no shortage of historical examples (remember the origins of the word 'nazi'). Yet we need to be careful to discriminate a valid and fruitful cultural nationalism from the dominating nationalism of hegemonic superiority. Here is the psychoanalyst of culture, Erich Fromm, in his book *The Sane Society*:

Nationalism is our form of incest, is our idolatry, is our insanity. "Patriotism" is its cult. It should hardly be necessary to say, that by "patriotism" I mean that attitude which puts the own nation above humanity, above the principles of truth and justice; not the loving interest in one's own nation, which is the concern with the nation's spiritual as much as with its material welfare — never with its power over other nations. Just as love for one individual which excludes the love for others

is not love, love for one's country which is not part of one's love for humanity is not love, but idolatrous worship.

This parallels a similar sentiment in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*:

Despite the widespread aspiration to build an authentic international community, the unity of the human family is not yet becoming a reality. This is due to obstacles originating in materialistic and nationalistic ideologies that contradict the values of the person integrally considered in all his various dimensions, material and spiritual, individual and community. In particular, any theory or form whatsoever of racism and racial discrimination is morally unacceptable. The coexistence among nations is based on the same values that should guide relations among human beings: truth, justice, active solidarity and freedom

(C, 433)

Political nationalism, however, is only one form of an ideology of domination. These days, the economic transnationalism of finance and banking is far more powerful and influential than many countries. It brings with it a cultural transnationalism of the Coke and Macdonalds variety as does the influence of all forms of media. These elements work together to coordinate the pursuit of status, wealth and power regardless of human cost. The response of Justice and Peace Scotland has been to emphasise and encourage initiatives for Fair Trade as part of a spiritual examination of our own lifestyle.

The mid nineteenth century philosopher Thomas Carlyle, when asked the population of England replied: 'Thirty million people, mostly fools'. Not perhaps the most charitable response, but I am reminded that for the classical Athenians, an 'idiot' was someone who only cared about his own interests (*idios*) and had no interest in the common good. The political involvement of Justice and Peace is not based on party loyalties or policies. Yet the gospel stricture on serving two masters (Luke 16:13) seems to be about establishing priorities. The balance was pointed out by Archbishop Romero:

In whichever political system or situation the church should not identify itself with any specific political option. Rather, it supports whatever there is that is just in it, while it is, at the same time, always ready to denounce what is unjust in it. It will not cease being the voice of the voiceless as long as there are people who are oppressed, who are marginalised from participation in the creation and the benefits of the development of the country.

Recently, following the initiative of the European network, Justice and Peace Scotland has engaged in dialogue with government and others on the issue of youth unemployment, in the overall context of the campaign for a Living Wage, as well as involvement in local Economic Forums.

In the approach to the political referendum last year, we examined the issues in the light of Catholic Social Teaching on self determination and proper subsidiarity. We are also involved in looking at the issue of non violence and the pursuit of peace in a country wedded to militarism and nuclear deterrence.

Socially and culturally we are concerned with the idolatry of cultural values which are made absolute, to the detriment of human dignity, excluding those who do not fit. This has long been a focus of our work, particularly with regard to the meaning of welfare in our society; our particular work with refugees and asylum seekers and their families; as well as recent work on human trafficking.

At the centre of our work is the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching and the effort to make it more available and accessible. It is no use having a tradition of teaching, however, if there are no students and practitioners. Rather than teaching it might be useful to see the tradition as formation in its full sense. Thomas Merton, the American Trappist monk whose centenary we celebrate this year, pointed out the difference, in a world of shifting fashions, between tradition and mere convention.

Tradition, which is always old, is at the same time ever new because it is always reviving - born again in each new generation, to be lived and applied in a new and particular way. Convention is simply the ossification of social customs. The activities of conventional people are merely excuses for NOT acting in a more integrally human way. Tradition nourishes the life of the spirit; convention merely disguises its interior decay. (No Man Is an Island)

We live at the mercy of a God of Surprises who says: '*My thoughts and my ways are not like yours.*' (Isaiah 55:8-9). Under this dispensation, '*the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste*' (Isaiah 60:12). As Christians, we know that our Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). And yet we must make our way in a world which needs to find the means of coexistence.

'[I]t is time to devise a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society. The principal author, the historic subject of this process, is the people as a whole and their culture, and not a single class, minority, group or elite. We do not

need plans drawn up by a few for the few, or an enlightened or outspoken minority which claims to speak for everyone. It is about agreeing to live together, a social and cultural pact.' (Evangelii Gaudium, n 239).

Ultimately, we believe that we are held up by the unconditional love of God. In this sense, as the Beatitudes tell us, we are blessed not in the world's terms of status, wealth and power; but rather in their absence, when we are persecuted for the sake of justice and righteousness. For then the Kingdom of heaven is ours.

And since you are our guests in Scotland, I hope you do not mind that I end with a few lines from one of our great (and paradoxically atheist) poets - Hugh MacDiarmid

*'He canna [cannot] Scotland see wha [who] yet
Canna see the Infinite,
And Scotland in true scale to it.'*