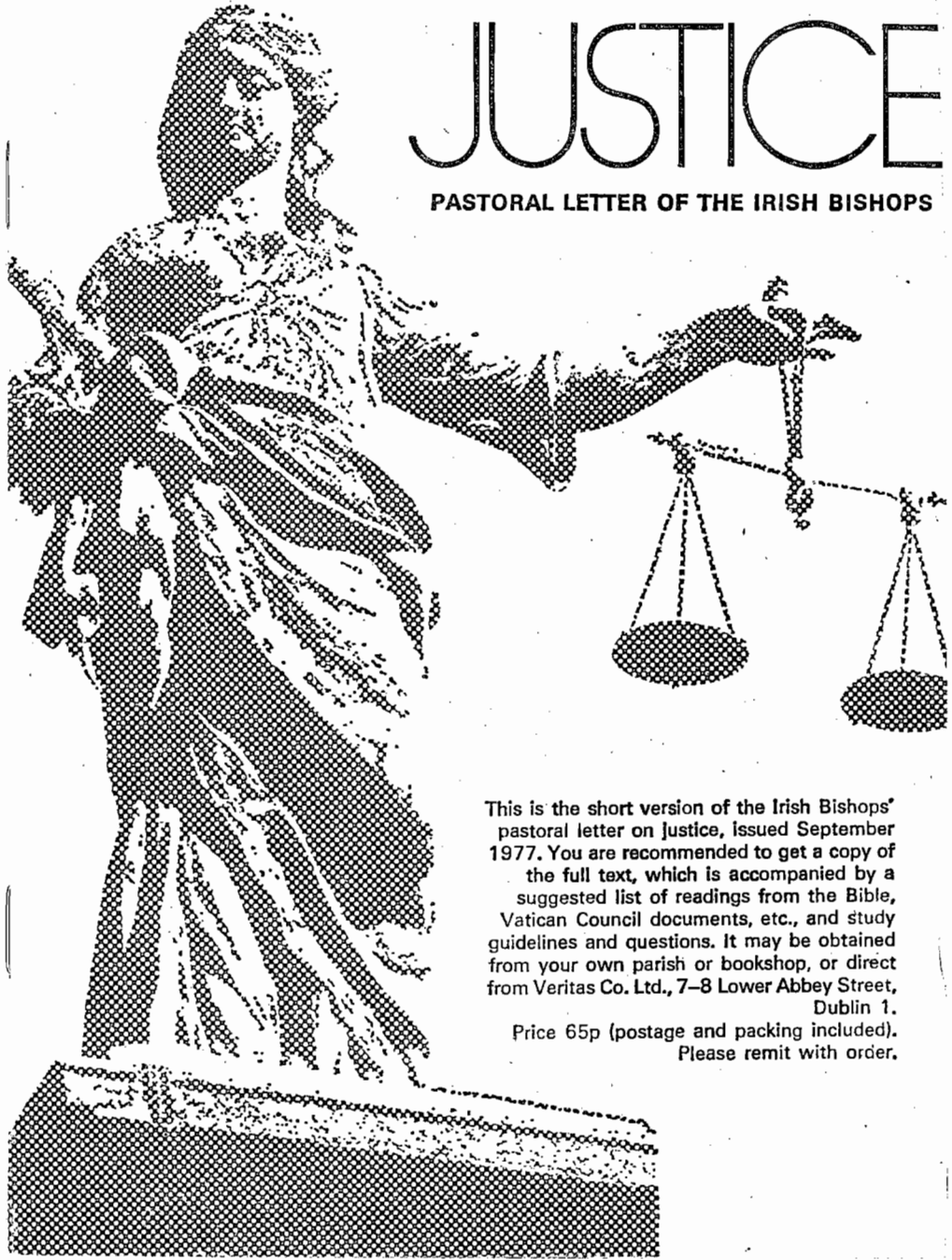


# THE WORK OF JUSTICE

PASTORAL LETTER OF THE IRISH BISHOPS



This is the short version of the Irish Bishops' pastoral letter on Justice, issued September 1977. You are recommended to get a copy of the full text, which is accompanied by a suggested list of readings from the Bible, Vatican Council documents, etc., and study guidelines and questions. It may be obtained from your own parish or bookshop, or direct from Veritas Co. Ltd., 7-8 Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1.

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## THE BIBLE AND JUSTICE

1. All through the Bible the message is clear, that we cannot separate the love and worship of God from the love and service of our neighbour. Man is created in the image of God; and we cannot give God his due place in our lives unless we are also giving his due place to each man. Jesus Christ himself was quoting the Old Testament when he summed up "the whole Law and the Prophets" in the words:

you shall love the Lord your God  
with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind  
and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

2. The Prophets constantly stressed the place of love and justice in true religion, especially love and justice towards the poor and the weak. The Church repeats the message of Isaiah for us at the beginning of Lent each year. It reminds us that, if we want our fasting to be genuine, we have to set about "breaking unjust fetters . . . , letting the oppressed go free . . . , sharing our bread with the hungry and sheltering the homeless poor" (*Isaiah*: 58:6-10).

### God, the Liberator of the oppressed

3. God revealed himself in the Old Testament primarily as the God who freed his oppressed people from bondage in Egypt. The theme of God as the defender of the poor and the liberator of the oppressed recurs again and again throughout the Bible. There is a sense in which the religion of the Bible is all about justice: justice to God first, and then justice to men, especially the poor and the helpless, because God is their protector.

### Christ as the Friend of the poor

4. Christ is the fulfilment of all the promises of God in the Old Testament. He could not have fulfilled those promises if he too were not the protector of the poor and the liberator of the oppressed. This is, in fact, precisely how he introduced himself in his first public sermon. Making his own the words of the Prophet Isaiah, he said:

The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me . . .  
He has sent me to bring the Good News to the poor,  
to proclaim liberty to captives . . .  
to set the downtrodden free (*Luke* 4:18-22).

5. Passages like this, of course, do not refer only to the materially poor. One could be materially prosperous and yet far from Christ's spirit. One could be materially poor and yet live in the spirit of Christ. Our Lord said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit".

### Liberation from sin

6. The liberation which Christ offers to men is liberation from sin.

This is much more true and total liberation than the raising of men from material poverty to material comfort. If men stay sunk in selfishness, pride, greed, bitterness, hate, then they will still be slaves, even if liberated from material poverty. They will still be oppressed by their sinful passions, and these are the most tyrannical of all masters.

7. Christ's liberation goes far beyond political or social reform or revolution. It requires a total transformation of oneself into the likeness of Christ, through the work of Christ's holy Spirit.

8. This is more than a private affair of the individual's spiritual life. Christ and his spirit of love and justice have to be brought also into social relationships, into group behaviour and into political decisions. Situations have to be changed as well as souls. Society has to be converted as well as selves. No man can be a saint who is indifferent to how other men live.

### Baptism and justice

9. It is in Baptism that we first receive our commitment to live in the likeness of Christ and receive his Spirit to give us the power to do so. Baptism or "christening" makes us "other Christs". St. Paul says: "You are all one person in Jesus Christ" (*Galatians* 3:28). There is no such thing as a "second-class" Christian; there are no "lower classes" for the Christian.

10. Christian Baptism could rightly be claimed to be the most revolutionary thing in human history. The fact that one is reborn in Christ is infinitely more important than that one is born of certain parents, or in a certain income group, a certain residential area or a particular social class. Rebirth in Christ cancels out all inequalities, removes all stigmas. Baptism makes us all fundamentally equal in Christ, male and female, rich and poor.

11. Many kinds of social snobbery are hard to reconcile with this Christian truth. In the light of Christ, a man's dignity does not come from his birth or his salary or his class, but from the fact that he is God's son and that Christ died for him. To ignore the poor man and kow-tow to the rich one is to insult God. It is to say that cash is worth more than God's image; and that it means more to be a rich man's son than to be God's son.

12. This is an appropriate place to make a special reference to our treatment of the Travelling People. We tend to judge them by different standards from those we apply to other groups. If a few of the Travelling People misbehave, we sometimes say this is "typical" of them all. We do not say this about other sections of society, some of whose members also misbehave. We tend to blame the Travellers as a whole for the unruliness of a few. We are inconsistent in regard to them: we expect them to be good neighbours, yet we refuse to have them as neighbours. Surely our values in many such matters are still far from being Christian. There are territories in our own hearts and minds which still have to be converted to Christ.

## II JUSTICE BETWEEN MAN AND MAN

### **Justice before alms**

13. Justice means, firstly, giving every man what is due to him. Before giving "charity" or alms we must first give others what is due to them. Justice involves giving another what is rightly his own. We have to give back what is not ours before we can give away what is ours.

14. We must not think of justice as something for others to practise, not for us. We have to think of justice as something for us to give, not simply to get. Justice is about my relations with others; it is about my life, my business, my commercial dealings, my profession, my style of life. Justice is about buying and selling. It is about employing men and women or making them redundant. Justice is about meeting my contracts, promising and delivering what I promise at the promised time. Justice is about fair prices and just profits. It is about honesty and truthfulness and straight dealing in work, in business, in public service, in political life.

### **Stealing, old and new**

15. We have recently become careless about justice. There is a great increase in pilfering in stores and in other forms of stealing. There are many ways of stealing. Things like overcharging, profiteering, drawing money for work that is not done or is not of the quality promised, living beyond one's means while not meeting one's bills—these are really forms of stealing.

### **Robbery and crime**

16. There has been a disturbing increase in Ireland lately of burglary and robbery, particularly organised robbery and robbery with violence. This latter is all the more appalling when, as often occurs, the persons attacked and robbed are helpless old people. There is also a frightening increase in vandalism and in callous destruction of public property. We must surely worry about the moral state of our society when this kind of crime becomes a regular occurrence. Every possible support must be given to the police forces in their difficult task of coping with crime, and particularly with violent crime. We must also make every effort as a society to eradicate the social situations which seem to breed violent crime and vandalism, such as chronic unemployment, bad housing, slum conditions, educational deprivation, lack of constructive activities and recreational outlets for youth. It should be a high priority for social and political policy to work out solutions to the problems of robbery and vandalism, so that people can again walk the streets of our cities with freedom and the old can sleep in their beds without fear.

### **Paying our bills**

17. There is little doubt but that many have become careless about

paying their personal debts. People who live beyond their means while defaulting on the payment of their bills are really maintaining their standard of living at the expense of others. Repentance for sins of this kind against justice is not genuine unless a real effort is made to make restitution for the injustice.

### **Abuses in hire-purchasing**

18. Some money-lending operations and some hire-purchase trading transactions amount to exploitation of the poor by extortionate interest rates. The law controlling these operations is often ignored. People can be wronged also by high-pressure salesmanship, where truth is sacrificed to quick sales, as well as by dishonest and untruthful claims by advertisers.

### **Injustices can snowball**

19. The damage done to others by acts of injustice is often much more than meets the eye. Repeated smaller acts of dishonesty and injustice by one person can mount up into one grave injustice. Single smaller acts of injustice by several persons can snowball and gather enough force to destroy another's whole livelihood. Injustice can set up chain reactions and have long-term effects. A worker who cheats his employer by pilfering from the firm or idling on the job may have said: "I wasn't the only one to cheat". An employer who acts unjustly towards his employees may have said: "It was my own factory and my own money; I can do what I like with it". A customer who defaults on his bills may have said: "There were other bad debts as well as mine". But each one has helped to do a wrong which can be great and grave in its total effect.

### **Justice in the home**

20. Justice must begin in the home. A husband can sin against justice by giving his wife an inadequate share of the salary or pay-packet and by squandering on drink or gambling what is due in justice to his family. Wives too can sin against justice by improvident spending and by neglecting the home. The amount of money spent on gambling nowadays, even by women and mothers, is disturbing. Young workers have an obligation in justice to contribute to the family budget.

21. In Ireland much abuse of justice, in the home, in the community and in society, comes from intemperance. Excessive drinking is one of the greatest sources of harm and sorrow in this country. Yet drinking abuses seem to be spreading all the time and to be steadily involving more groups of the population—women, young boys and young girls, even sometimes schoolchildren. The way in which drink is advertised in the media would seem to call for examination.

22. Women have equal dignity and equal rights with men; and discriminatory wages and conditions of work in respect of women in employment should be eliminated. An equitable system of social welfare would be careful to exclude discriminatory provisions regarding entitlements for girls and women.

## JUSTICE BETWEEN ORGANISED GROUPS AND SOCIETY

### Interdependence in modern society

23. In the modern world we have all become more dependent on one another. This means that we are capable of either helping one another as never before or inflicting greater harm upon one another than was ever possible in history before. Unless we acquire a new sense of community and brotherhood, then society is bound to get more and more violent and destructive. This sense of community and brotherhood is precisely what is demanded by Christianity. The only way to turn society's new interdependence into survival instead of suicide is to renew the sense of Christian community.

### Social responsibility

24. More and more decisions are now taken for people by their group leaders. People will often in private admit that they disapprove of action decided by their organisation and deplore the harm it does to others. But still they go along with it. We need to inform and educate our conscience, and have the courage to stand by it, even if we stand alone. As someone has put it recently, we must not allow "governments, corporations and unions to do our sinning for us".

25. Not everyone, of course, is able to speak persuasively in public or to carry influence at meetings. Organisations have each their rules and conventions; and sometimes these are such as to make opposition or dissent very difficult. Members should then press for reform of the rules, in order to encourage more open and responsible discussion and the widest possible participation in the taking of decisions.

26. Sin can be committed not only by personal acts and decisions and in person-to-person relations. Our acts and decisions have consequences for many others and for society. Also we are involved in acts and decisions or omissions of our various communities and organisations. We need to think also of the communal or social aspects of personal sins. If our conscience never bothers us about justice, then it is much more likely that our conscience is careless than that we are never at fault. The social teaching of the Church, as developed in the great Social Encyclicals of the modern Popes, has come to lay more and more emphasis upon social responsibility and social guilt.

### Responsibilities of capital and of property

27. The Church never taught an absolute or unqualified right to private property. She has always qualified the right of ownership in two ways. First of all, she has insisted that ownership is a stewardship of property, given by God to owners for the benefit of all. In the second place, the Church has insisted that ownership should be as widely distributed throughout society as possible, so that all may have their just share of the things God has given for the benefit of all. There is no

such thing in justice and no such thing in Catholic teaching as an absolute right to do what I like with my money, my profits, my capital, my property, or my land. The proper description of Catholic teaching about ownership is: "Private ownership with social function".

28. The fact of the matter is that wealth and profit and property nowadays depend very heavily on public subsidy. In a modern economy, large injections of public money are poured into all sectors of industry and agriculture. No-one can any longer claim that he "made his money" by his own unaided efforts. A man "makes money" now in great part by intelligently using publicly-provided opportunities and publicly-financed grants and subsidies of one kind or another. The right to ownership of wealth, property, or means of production, always carries with it obligations towards others and towards the common good of the nation.

### Responsibilities and rights of workers

29. Industry has obligations, not only to its investors and shareholders but also to its employees. It is immoral to take decisions about closing factories or paying off workers without taking thought of and making all possible provision for the workers. Workers should be themselves involved in discussions preliminary to such decisions. The concept of worker-participation is one which accords fully with the rights and the dignity of the employed person. Measures taken or proposed in both parts of Ireland in recent times to introduce forms of worker-participation deserve welcome and support.

30. Workers' responsibility is engaged in a special way in decisions to withdraw labour. The right to strike is a basic human right of workers. Denial of it would be a grave injustice. Without the strike weapon, workers would never have been able to get the improvement in their wages and conditions which they have got in this century. Without it, they would not be able to ensure the maintenance of their position even now. It is sad but it is true that workers needed the power which trade unions and the strike weapon gave them before they could get simple justice.

31. The strike weapon can, of course, be abused. In modern times, due to the interdependence of different groups in society, very many more people are put to loss and damage by a strike than the employer. Loss and damage are inflicted on the public at large, on the whole national economy, on one's fellow-workers. A small number of key men, especially in the public and service sectors, can hold the whole nation up to ransom, even when it is hard to see that real injustice is the cause of their action or that justice absolutely requires their strike. They can certainly inflict upon the general public and the national economy a degree of damage which is out of all proportion to the amount or the justice of their claim.

32. Certain questions must be asked by all those involved before a strike is begun.

1. Is it sure that a real injustice is present?

2. Is this injustice grave enough to justify the loss and the damage caused?

3. Is there a proper proportion between the loss inflicted and the lawful end pursued?

4. Have all efforts been made to reach settlement by negotiation, and have these efforts failed?

A person involved in a strike decision must be able to answer these questions in the affirmative before he can say: "This strike is morally justified". We must not forget that a strike is a weapon of last resort and can never be the first move in a dispute.

33. It is to be feared that there have been strikes in recent years which were not morally justified. These have not all been launched by industrial or service workers. Many professional bodies have now set up organisations to defend their own interests, and these have adopted the strike weapon for their own advantage. The fact that these are frequently powerful bodies, secure in their employment and enjoying a monopoly in rendering essential services to the public, has made their use of the strike weapon all the more destructive. The example of such people, who are often in a privileged situation, and who have a corresponding position of power and a corresponding social responsibility, is regrettable.

34. Power can always be abused. In modern society, many groups have power and can abuse it. An industrialist or an investor cannot say: "My money is my own and I can do what I like with it". But neither can an employee say: "I can do what I like with my own labour, at my own price and on my own terms". Neither the rights of property and wealth nor the rights of labour are absolute. Both are limited by the rights of others. Both involve responsibilities to the general good.

35. It is deplorable that experience still too often makes it plausible for workers to assume that "strong action pays off" and that nothing else "gets results". The non-militant groups can easily come to feel that they are being left behind in the income race. Management should not wait for industrial unrest or threat of unrest before conceding reasonable improvements in pay and conditions. Workers' rights should not be assessed by management in terms of their potential militancy. It must be recognised, however, that great progress has been made in these spheres both by union leaders and by employers and personnel managers. The potential strikes which are averted by the efforts of enlightened management and responsible labour leadership far outnumber the strikes which actually do occur. A spirit of patriotism and a sense of social responsibility on both sides of industry are critically needed by our country at this time.

## JUSTICE IN SOCIETY

### **Work and human dignity**

36. One of the primary duties of society is to create employment opportunities for the greatest possible number of its citizens. In our kind of society, work, with the independence which it offers, is an important condition for retaining the respect of the community, without which a man can scarcely retain his self-respect. Those who remain workless for long inevitably become marginalised in society. Long-term or chronic unemployment can be gravely damaging to the personality. This is especially so in the case of the young, many of whom are at present unable to find jobs, in spite of the better education which they have been given and the expectations thereby aroused in them. Our unemployment problem should weigh on the conscience of us all. Let no-one talk of the nation's crisis being over so long as we leave all these thousands unemployed.

### **Maximising employment**

37. To provide jobs in Ireland for the greatest possible number of our people should be a clear aim of national policy. It should be accepted as a national challenge and a commitment by everyone. It will not be easy to realise. No facile promises should be bandied around concerning it. Unless sacrifices and restraints are seen by all as necessary and are voluntarily accepted by all and especially by the better off, then there will be no way whatever whereby the needed jobs can be created. A real injustice would be done to the Irish people by politicians or other leaders of opinion who would suggest that our economic problems can be solved without more work, restraint, saving and sacrifice. A real injustice would be done to all sections by group leaders who would claim that the necessary sacrifices should be made by others, but not by their own followers. Political promises, economic forecasts, group demands or refusals, all raise questions of justice. Justice demands truthfulness, facing the hard facts, "telling it as it is" to the people. It is the jobs and living standards of people that are at stake.

38. The problem of maximising employment is made all the greater in the short term by Ireland's growing population. For the first time in more than a century this island's history of population decline has been halted and is being put into reverse. Our population is rising again. It will probably rise, in the Republic, by nearly half a million over the next ten years. We already have in our population the highest proportion of young people of any European country.

39. Instead of seeing an expanding and increasingly youthful population as a threat, it is surely right to see it as an opportunity and challenge. Our growing numbers, and especially the growing numbers of our young people, should be seen as one of Ireland's greatest hopes and most valuable assets. A growing population can help to provide an

expanding home market for Irish industry. Internationally, it is important that Ireland can now offer a work-force of well-educated young workers, of a quality not easily found elsewhere.

40. It is true that mass emigration is no longer going to be available as an outlet for our unemployed. But emigration was never an acceptable solution for our employment problems. Emigration in the history of Ireland has been a factor making for social fatalism and economic stagnation. It was often the men and women of creative ideas, of initiative, of skills and talents, who were leaving. In letting them go, this country was losing a human resource which it could not spare. The legacy of fatalism remains with us. The danger is that we would adopt a fatalistic or complacent attitude now in face of our new unemployment problem and would dream of solutions which require the minimum effort and the minimum sacrifice from the better-off groups in our country.

41. Our expanding population is a formidable challenge. Creation of jobs for our people will be one of the great tests of national spirit and of patriotic endeavour in this generation. In the face of this challenge, a new definition of patriotism must be created, a new understanding of what it means to love and serve Ireland must be formed. The community as a whole needs to be much better informed about the facts. The strain on the country's basic services, health, education, welfare, is going to be extremely severe in the decades immediately ahead. Well over 30,000 new jobs a year will be needed for the next ten years. This target far exceeds anything hitherto achieved, even in our best years. But the risks to social peace which would follow from a failure to face that challenge would be grave indeed. All those competent to judge have warned that, if present unemployment rates were allowed to grow or even to persist for too long, the dangers of grave social and socio-political tension in this country could be very great. The matter is too serious for political point-scoring. Politicians must bring to this debate a very genuine courage, objectivity and sincerity. The truth may sometimes be unpopular; but concealment or evasion of it would be fatal.

### **Job creation**

42. The recent Green Paper, *Economic and Social Development, 1976-1980*, described unemployment (with roughly 10% of the labour force out of work) as "the most urgent Irish economic problem". Consequently, our industrial development policies and incentives should be consciously geared towards job creation. It is a matter for specialists to propose ways in which priority can be given to attracting and supporting such industries as will be both viable and competitive but also seem to offer the greatest likelihood of creating jobs and of generating ancillary industries. Small local industries can make an important contribution to job creation. It is important that all community leaders should do everything possible to encourage local development and to foster a climate of respect and support for men of initiative and enterprise in the locality.

43. The employment potential of agriculture must also be developed. It can be a matter of justice between parents and children to ensure that sons are not unreasonably denied opportunities for prudently introducing modern techniques and new lines of production on family farms. The owner of a farm, whether large or small, has a corresponding moral obligation not to neglect it and not, by negligence or selfishness, to prevent its making its proportionate contribution to the national welfare.

44. We need also to try to overcome inherited attitudes which are not congenial to local initiative, whether in agriculture or in local industry. Local jealousies, suspicions and rivalries need to be replaced by a spirit of community and cooperation. Much has already been achieved in community building and the work of many local development associations is beyond praise. The scope for community development and community leadership remains vast.

### **The unemployed**

45. Meanwhile, there remains the grave problem of our many thousands of unemployed. We should all have the country's high unemployment figures on our conscience. Unemployment is a great moral evil in society. It is a grave social danger. Those who have jobs in these days of recession are a kind of privileged class. They have an obligation towards those who, through no fault of their own, have no work. Those who work, whether in industry, farming, professions or otherwise, owe it to the others to make their work a means to national recovery.

46. We should not be too ready to believe stories about widespread abuses of unemployment benefit. Abuses of our welfare system are relatively rare and there is machinery for their detection and elimination. Nevertheless such abuses do exist, and consciences are lax about them. It needs to be firmly stressed that to take money under false pretences from the social security system is no less sinful than to take money under false pretences from private individuals.

47. It remains true, however, that those in secure employment are too prone to critical or suspicious attitudes towards the unemployed. A man who has to depend entirely on unemployment benefit or assistance for his support and, if married, the support of his family, can certainly by no means be said to be well-off. Indeed, in many cases, his income is inadequate for normal reasonable needs. When we think of the unemployed, we must not forget the very large number of children whose fathers are unemployed and whose lives are in danger of being diminished and deprived because of this. We must remember that there are also considerable numbers of people who, through lack of knowledge or for other reasons, do not apply for their unemployment and other entitlements.

48. In Northern Ireland, unemployment has further special dimensions. It is notably more severe in areas of Catholic population than in

the population as a whole. Concomitantly, this uneven distribution of unemployment over the population has an immediate link with the social and political violence afflicting that part of Ireland. Unemployed youth can very easily be attracted to the myths and deluded by the propaganda of paramilitary organisations. Effective measures to reduce Northern Ireland's unemployment would, with guarantees against religious discrimination in the location of industries or the allocation of jobs, make a real contribution to the prospects for peace.

### **Responsibilities of the employed**

49. There seems no denying that higher living standards for those securely employed are sometimes in direct competition with the creation of new jobs. As awareness of the realities of our economic situation increases, and a greater sense of social responsibility and social partnership develops, we believe that those in employment will respond positively to appeals for reasonable income restraint. To be credible, however, these appeals should be accompanied by firm assurances that the real value of wages will be protected, that any excess accruing profits will be ploughed back into new jobs, and that new jobs will effectively be created. There are grounds for confidence that, by and large, Irish workers are more concerned with protecting their existing standards of living than with being better off at the expense of other workers' jobs or job prospects. In any case, even employed persons themselves will benefit when new jobs are found for the unemployed; for, when more people are put back into jobs, they will then themselves be contributing to the nation's social purse rather than being obliged, through no fault of their own, to depend upon it.

50. This social purse can of course be replenished only out of taxation. Taxation is understandably unpopular. Yet, here too, better understanding of realities might help to engender a growing sense of social responsibility. It is for governments to ensure that systems of taxation are just and are equitably distributed over the different sectors of the community; but there is also a moral obligation on citizens to pay their just and lawful share of taxes. Taxes are, in modern society, the means whereby the community meets its own obligations in justice towards its less favoured members. Pope Paul has said it is a matter of conscience for us to be ready to pay higher taxes so that the public authorities may have the means whereby to help the needy.

51. Employed persons have also the duty not to press for wage increases so high as to price Irish products out of overseas markets. If Irish wages rise unduly and thereby help to make the cost of Irish goods uncompetitive in the export market, then more workers will be put out of work and the recession will deepen into crisis. Neither the world nor the European Economic Community owes Ireland a living. We must earn it for ourselves by honest work, at realistic wages, in highly competitive conditions. When we speak of justice, we should remember it means giving before it means getting. So many in modern society stand with the hand out to get, not with the hand out to give. A country is sick if everybody wants to get more, but nobody wants to give more and nobody is willing to do without more, or even to wait.

### **The poor**

52. It may be sometimes thought that no-one is really poor in Ireland now, or in any case that those who are poor are somehow to blame for their poverty. But in fact, reliable research has established that at least 20% of the population is indisputably poor. For example, these people do not have enough to eat because they can't afford it. They can't afford decent clothing. They admit that, if they had more money, they would buy more food and better clothing.

53. Among these are many chronically unemployed people, many unskilled workers, many deserted wives, many chronically ill or handicapped people, many educationally deprived people, many badly housed people, many ex-prisoners. Among these are also a number of small farmers, especially in the older age groups.

54. There are notable concentrations of poor people in certain fairly clearly defined areas. Certain urban districts have the name of poverty areas can be degrading for all who live there. Young people brought up there are in danger of being conditioned for lives of poverty. There are also poor rural areas, with small farms of bad land, and with an environment which tends to destroy spirit and hope. In other words, areas which are poor have been almost fated to stay poor. Also, poverty tends to follow certain identifiable conditions, notably chronic ill health, educational deprivation or retardation, lack of job skill or training, sub-standard housing.

55. The pattern of poverty in Northern Ireland is broadly similar to that in the Republic. The proportion of poor people to the rest of the population seems to be about the same. However, an important aspect of poverty in the North is that, like unemployment, it affects the Catholic population significantly more than it affects the general population. This helps to perpetuate a sense of grievance, alienation and hopelessness, which can easily be exploited by propagandists for violence. As in the case of unemployment, therefore, it must be said that a systematic programme to eliminate poverty in Northern Ireland would be likely to have a significant effect on violence in the so-called "ghettos".

### **A national programme to eliminate poverty**

56. In a society aspiring to be Christian, it should be a consistent aim of social policy to work steadily towards the reduction and ultimate elimination of poverty. The virtual elimination of poverty is not beyond our capacity, even in the present recession. The causes which generate poverty can be identified, foreseen, often checked or prevented. Special facilities for the health, education and job-training of the poor are needed.

57. Enlightened social welfare policy could solve many of the problems of poverty. In this Pastoral Letter, we bishops endorse the recommendation of our Council for Social Welfare, which has urged

"the principle of a guaranteed minimum income, related to the cost of living index, for each household, whatever its circumstances".

### **Housing**

58. Elimination of sub-standard housing is also necessary, since bad housing is an important factor in the generation of poverty and in its perpetuation. Landlords who demand rents which are excessive and out of proportion with the conditions and amenities provided sin against justice. So also do those who make exorbitant profits through speculation in land for housing development.

### **Respecting the dignity of the poor**

59. Some people still have critical and condemnatory attitudes towards the poor. These attitudes must be rejected. All who deal with the poor, all public services, all professional bodies, indeed all the better off, should take care to treat the poor with dignity and to give them equal treatment and equal respect. Special steps should be taken to ensure genuine equality before the law for the poor. When expense and all other factors are taken into account, it will hardly be claimed that, as things are now, a poor man's son has as much chance as a rich man's son of gaining his legal rights or of obtaining the law's leniency.

60. It will not be enough, however, to cease discriminating in any way against the poor. If we are to assure basic human rights to everyone, we will instead have quite deliberately to begin to discriminate in favour of the poor. A real transfer of money and of opportunity must be made by the better-off sections of society to the poorer groups, if the latter are to be raised to minimum standards of human dignity and if we are to lay claim to being a just and Christian society.

### **Voluntary action for justice**

61. But for some time to come, many of the improvements which are urgently needed in the range and quality of our welfare services will have to depend in great measure on the work of voluntary organisations. More personnel, particularly young personnel, and more financial support for these voluntary organisations are a great need.

62. It is necessary that the poor and the old be adequately informed about their entitlements. Community Information Centres do very valuable work in this connection. It is important that people in need should be helped to understand clearly that their social benefits are rights, not handouts or favours.

63. This might help in time to remove that unfortunate practice whereby people can be persuaded that social benefits are granted through some political favour or influence. There is still far too much political patronage in this country. When appointments, promotions, contracts or other favours are made to depend upon political "influence" or "pull", rather than on merit, justice is violated, politics itself is debased, and public institutions and structures are discredited

and individuals degraded. Public opinion should clearly and strongly reprobate such practices. All political parties should pledge themselves to eliminate them.

### **Commitment to justice**

64. Justice does not happen; it has to be willed and worked for and built into legislation. No system, as such, will by itself guarantee justice. All wealth and all power can be abused. Only a combination of moral commitment to justice and political commitment to the legislation and the structures of justice will create a just society. Continual vigilance is necessary to ensure both that the moral conviction will not become obscured and that the political commitment will not be allowed to flag.

65. Every group in society has its special responsibilities in this regard. Tax evasion, abuse of the dole or the welfare system, restrictive practices in industry, unnecessary and unjust strikes, abuses of expense accounts, fraudulent drawing of industrial or agricultural grants, all these should be matter for examination of conscience and for confession, just as much as failures in justice in person-to-person relationships. A new attitude of responsibility towards public money and public property must be cultivated and must be taught to children.

66. There can also be great laxity of moral conscience in respect of insurance claims in connection with accidents and personal injuries. The moral obligations of justice and truthfulness apply to dealings with large bodies, like insurance corporations, no less strictly than they apply in dealings between individuals.

### **Communal repentance**

67. The new rite of Penance gives us the opportunity of alerting our conscience better to our social responsibilities. Communal celebrations of penance can make us more aware than before of how our personal behaviour and life-style affect our community and our society and indeed our world. By what we do or fail to do, we uplift and liberate our fellows, spiritually, morally and materially; or we damage, degrade and enslave them.

### **Simplicity of life-style**

68. The penance we receive in confession is part of our share in Christ's struggle to free the world from the grip of sin. Penance must also have a permanent place in our personal lives. A very effective and realistic and relevant form of penance for all of us now would be to review all the areas of our activity and expenditure so as to see in what ways we can deliberately simplify our life-style and gradually eliminate both luxury and waste from our lives. Luxury and waste in our country and in our world are a scandal. What are we going to say, for example, in excuse for the fact that more than 300 million pounds was spent on drink, last year, in the Republic alone?

### **The Mass and justice, love and peace**

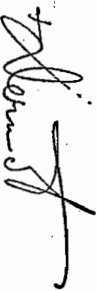
69. Christ's Kingdom is a Kingdom of justice, love and peace. It is at



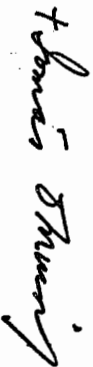
Mass above all that we celebrate the presence of Christ's Kingdom already in our world and look forward to its final establishment in glory. Mass gives us every week, every day, our commitment to serve one another, to give to one another. At Mass, Christ's body is made present for us through his words: "This is my body, given up for you". When we receive his body, we answer, "Amen". Part of the meaning of this Amen should be that we are ready in our turn to give ourselves to others.

70. When the priest raises his hands at the end of Mass to give us the final blessing, he is continuing the blessing our Lord gave us as he ascended into Heaven. After the Ascension, the apostles continued staring into the sky after him. Angels said to them: "Why are you standing here looking into the sky? This same Jesus will come back in the same way as you have seen him go". It was as though to say: "There is work to do here on earth before he comes; and the time is short. There is no time for staring into space". We have to have shaped the world into readiness for the coming of Christ's Kingdom, into a place where God's Will is done on earth as in heaven, a place where justice and love have their home. We must work as in the expectancy that he is coming soon.

71. After the final blessing, we are sent from Mass with the message: "Go in the peace of Christ". This is our mandate to carry the Mass out into our world. Peace is the work of justice, and justice is the sincerity of love. The Mass summons all of us to work, to service and to sacrifice, so that we may together make of our society a kingdom of justice, love and peace, until Christ comes again.



✠ Dermot Ryan, Archbishop of Dublin, Primate of Ireland.



✠ Thomas Morris, Archbishop of Cashel.



✠ Joseph Cunnane, Archbishop of Tuam.