

MEN AND WOMEN FOR OTHERS

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Re-Education for Justice

Education for justice has become in recent years one of the chief concerns of the Church. Why? Because there is a new awareness in the Church that participation in the promotion of justice and the liberation of the oppressed is a constitutive element of the mission which Our Lord has entrusted to her.¹ Impelled by this awareness, the Church is now engaged in a massive effort to education - or rather to re-educate - herself, her children, and all men and women so that we may all "lead our life in its entirety... in accord with the evangelical principles of personal and social morality to be expressed in a living Christian witness."²

Men and Women for Others

Today our prime educational objective must be to form men-and-women-for-others; men and women who will live not for themselves but for God and his Christ - for the God-man who lived and died for all the world; men and women who cannot even conceive of love of God which does not include love for the least of their neighbors; men and women completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce.

What then shall we do?

This kind of education goes directly counter to the prevailing educational trend practically everywhere in the world. We Jesuits have always been heavily committed to the educational apostolate. We still are. What, then, shall we do? Go with the current or against it? I can think of no subject more appropriate than this for the General of the Jesuits to take up with the former students of Jesuits schools.

First, let me ask this question: Have we Jesuits educated you for justice? You and I know what many of your Jesuit teachers will answer to that question. They will answer, in all sincerity and humility: No, we have not. If the terms "justice" and "education for justice" carry all the depth of meaning which the Church gives them today, we have not educated you for justice.

Repair the lack in us

What is more, I think you will agree with this self-evaluation, and with the same sincerity and humility acknowledge that you have not been trained for the kind of action for justice and witness to justice which the Church now demands of us. What does this mean? It

means that we have work ahead of us. We must help each other to repair this lack in us, and above all make sure that in future the education imparted in Jesuit schools will be equal to the demands of justice in the world.

It can be done

It will be difficult, but we can do it. We can do it because, despite our historical limitations and failures, there is something which lies at the very center of the Ignatian spirit, and which enables us to renew ourselves ceaselessly and thus to adapt ourselves to new situations as they arise.

What is this something? It is the spirit of constantly seeking the will of God. It is that sensitiveness to the Spirit which enables us to recognize where, in what direction, Christ is calling us at different periods of history, and to respond to that call.

In accord with God's will

This is not to lay any prideful claim to superior insight or intelligence. It is simply our heritage from the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. For these Exercises are essentially a method enabling us to make very concrete decisions in accordance with God's will. It is a method that does not limit us to any particular option, but spreads out before us the whole range of practicable options in any given situation; opens up for us a sweeping vision embracing many possibilities, to the end that God himself, in all his tremendous originality, may trace out our path for us.

It is this "indifference," in the sense of lack of differentiation, this not being tied down to anything except God's will, that gives to the Society and to the men and women it has been privileged to educate what we may call their multi-faceted potential, their readiness for anything, any service that may be demanded of them by the signs of the times.

Readiness for change

Jesuit education in the past had its limitations. It was conditioned by time and place. As a human enterprise it will always be. But it could not have been a complete failure if we were able to pass on to you this spirit of openness to new challenges, this readiness for change, this willingness - putting it in Scriptural terms - to undergo conversion. This is our hope: that we have educated you to listen to the living God; to read the Gospel so as always to find new light in it; to think with the Church, within which the Word of God always ancient, ever new, resounds with that precise note and timbre needed by each historical epoch. For this is what counts; on this is founded our confidence for the future.

It is not as a father speaking to children that I speak to you today. It is as a companion, a fellow alumnus, speaking to his classmates. Sitting together on the same school bench, let us together listen to the Lord, the Teacher of all mankind.

WHAT KIND OF JUSTICE? WHAT KIND OF PERSON?

There are two lines of reflection before us. One is to deepen our understanding of the idea of justice as it becomes more and more clear in the light of the Gospel and the signs of the times. The other is to determine the character and quality of the type of people we want to form, the type of man or woman into which we must be changed, and towards which the generations succeeding us must be encouraged to develop, if we and they are to serve this evangelical ideal of justice.

The first line of reflection begins with the Synod of Bishops of 1971, and its opening statement on "Justice in the World:"

Gathered from the whole world, in communion with all who believe in Christ and with the entire human family, and opening our hearts to the Spirit who is making the whole of creation new, we have questioned ourselves about the mission of the People of God to further justice in the world.

Scrutinizing the "signs of the times" and seeking to detect the meaning of emerging history... we have listened to the Word of God that we might be converted to the fulfilling of the divine plan for the salvation of the world...

We have... been able to perceive the serious injustices which are building around the world of men and women a network of domination, oppression and abuses which stifle freedom and which keep the greater part of humanity from sharing in the building up and enjoyment of a more just and more fraternal world.

At the same time we have noted the inmost stirring moving the world in its depths. There are facts constituting a contribution to the furthering of justice. In associations of men and women and among peoples there is arising a new awareness which spurs them on to liberate themselves and to be responsible for their own destiny.

The call of the church

Please note that these words are not a mere repetition of what the Church has traditionally taught. They are not a refinement of doctrine at the level of abstract theory. They are the resonance of an imperious call of the living God asking his Church and all men of good will to adopt certain attitudes and undertake certain types of action which will enable them effectively to come to the aid of mankind oppressed and in agony.

This interpretation of the signs of the times did not originate with the Synod. It began with the Second Vatican Council; its application to the problem of justice was made with considerable vigor in *Populorum Progressio*; and spreading outward from this center to

the ends of the earth, it was taken up in 1968 by the Latin American Bishops at Medellin, in 1969 by the African Bishops at Kampala, in 1970 by the Asian Bishops in Manila. In 1971, Pope Paul VI gathered all these voices together in the great call to action of *Octogesima Adveniens*.

Action for justice

The Bishops of the Synod took it one step further, and in words of the utmost clarity said: “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.” We cannot, then, separate action for justice and liberation from oppression from the proclamation of the Word of God.

Differences on what to do

This is plain speech indeed. However, it did not prevent doubts, questionings, even tensions from arising within the Church itself. It would be naïve not to recognize this fact. Contradictions, or at least dichotomies, have emerged regarding the actual implementation of this call to action, and our task now is to try to harmonize these dichotomies if we can. This would be in the spirit of the Holy Year that is coming, which is the spirit of reconciliation.

To begin with, let us note that these dichotomies are differences of stress rather than contradictions of ideas. In view of the present call to justice and liberation, where should we put our stress – in our attitudes, our activities, our life style:

1. Justice among persons, or justice before God?
2. Love of God, or love of the neighbor?
3. Christian charity or human justice?
4. Personal conversion or social reform?
5. Liberation in this life or salvation in the life to come?
6. Development through the inculcation of Christian values, or development through the application of scientific technologies and social ideologies?

Justice and the Church

1. Quite clearly, the mission of the Church is not coextensive with the furthering of justice on this planet. Still, the furthering of justice is a *constitutive element* of that mission, as the Synod teaches. Recall the Old Testament: that First Alliance, the pact of

Yahweh with his chosen people, was basically concerned with the carrying out of justice, to such a degree that the violation of justice as it concerns people implies a rupture of the Alliance with God. Turn, now, to the New Testament, and see how Jesus has received from his Father the mission to bring the Good News to the poor, liberation to the oppressed, and to make justice triumph. “Blessed are the poor” - why? Because the Kingdom has already come; the Liberator is at hand.

Love of neighbor

2. We are commanded to love God *and* to love our neighbor. But note what Jesus says: the second commandment is *like unto* the first; they fuse together into one compendium of the Law. And in his vision of the Last Judgment, what does the Judge say? “As long as you did this for one of the least of my brothers, you did it for me.”³

As Father Alfaro says:

Inclusion in or expulsion from the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus depends on our attitude toward the poor and oppressed; toward those who are identified in Isaiah 58,1-2 as the victims of human injustice and in whose regard God wills to realize his justice. What is strikingly new here is that Jesus makes these despised and marginalized folk his *brothers*. He identifies himself with the poor and the powerless, with all who are hungry and miserable. Every person in this condition is Christ’s brother or sister; that is why what is done for them is done for Christ himself. Whoever comes effectively to the aid of these brothers and sisters of Jesus belongs to his Kingdom; whoever abandons them to their misery excludes himself or herself from that Kingdom.⁴

Love and justice meet

3. Just as love of God, in the Christian view, fuses with love of neighbor, to the point that they cannot possibly be separated, so, too, charity and justice meet together and in practice are identical. How can you love someone and treat him or her unjustly? Take justice away from love and you destroy love. You do not have love if the beloved is not seen as a person whose dignity must be respected, with all that that implies. And even if you take the Roman notion of justice as giving to each his due, what is owing to him, Christians must say that we owe love to all people, enemies not excepted.

Just as we are never sure that we love God unless we love others, so we are never sure that we have love at all unless our love issues in works of justice. And I do not mean works of justice in a merely individualistic sense. I mean three things:

Works of justice

First, a basic attitude of respect for all people which forbids us ever to use them as instruments for our own profit.

Second, a firm resolve never to profit from, or allow ourselves to be suborned by, positions of power deriving from privilege, for to do so, even passively, is equivalent to active oppression. To be drugged by the comforts of privilege is to become contributors to injustice as silent beneficiaries of the fruits of injustice.

Third, an attitude not simply of refusal but of counterattack against injustice; a decision to work with others toward the dismantling of unjust social structures so that the weak, the oppressed, the marginalized of this world may be set free.

Personal inclination to evil

4. Sin is not only an act, a personal act, which makes us personally guilty. Over and above this, sin reaches out to what we may call the *periphery* of ourselves, vitiating our habits, customs, spontaneous reactions, criteria and patterns of thought, imagination, will. And it is not only ourselves who influence our "periphery." It is shaped by all who have helped to form us, by all who form part of our world.

We thus have a congenital inclination toward evil. In theological language this is called "concupiscence," which is, concretely, a combination in us of the sin of Adam and all the sins in history - including our own.

When we are converted, when God effects in us the marvel of justification, we turn to God and our brothers and sisters in our innermost selves, and as a consequence sin in the strict sense is washed away from us. However, the effects of sin continue their powerful domination over our "periphery," and this, quite often, in a way that we are not even aware of.

Now, Christ did not come merely to free us from sin and flood the center of our person with his grace. He came to win our *entire* self for God - including what I have called our "periphery." Christ came to do away not only with sin, but with its effects, even in this life; not only to give us his grace, but to show forth the power of his grace.

From personal to social structure

Let us see the meaning of this as it pertains to the relationship between personal conversion and structural reform. If "personal conversion" is understood in the narrow sense of justification operative only at the very core of our person, it does not adequately represent the truth of the matter, for such justification is only the root, the beginning of a renewal, a reform of the structures at the "periphery" of our being, not only personal but social.

If we agree on this, conclusions fairly tumble forth. For the structures of this world - our customs; our social, economic, and political systems; our commercial relations; in general, the institutions we have created for ourselves - insofar as they have injustice built into them, are the concrete forms in which sin is objectified. They are the

consequences of our sins throughout history, as well as the continuing stimulus and spur for further sin.

Saint John and the "world"

There is a biblical concept for this reality. It is what Saint John calls, in a negative sense, the "world." The "world" is in the social realm what "concupiscence" is in the personal, for, to use the classical definition of concupiscence, it "comes from sin and inclines us to it."

Hence, like concupiscence, the "world" as understood in this sense must also be the object of our efforts at purification. Our new vision of justice must give rise to a new kind of spirituality, of asceticism; or rather, an expansion of traditional spirituality and asceticism to include not only the personal but the social. In short, interior conversion is not enough. God's grace calls us not only to win back our whole selves for God, but to win back our whole world for God. We cannot separate personal conversion from structural social reform.

The struggle never ends

5. It follows that this purification, this social asceticism, this earthly liberation is so central in our Christian attitude toward life that whoever holds himself aloof from the battle for justice implicitly refuses love for his fellows and consequently for God. The struggle for justice will never end. Our efforts will never be fully successful in this life. This does not mean that such efforts are worthless.

God wants such partial successes. They are the first-fruits of the salvation wrought by Jesus. They are the signs of the coming of his Kingdom, the visible indications of its mysterious spreading among us. Of course, partial successes imply partial failures; painful failures; the defeat of many people, many of us, who will be overcome and destroyed in the fight against this "world." For this "world" will not take it lying down, as the vivid American expression has it. It will persecute, it will try to exterminate those who do not belong to it and stand in opposition to it.

But this defeat is only apparent. It is precisely those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice who are blessed. It is precisely the crucified who pass through the world "doing good and healing all."²

Technologies necessary

6. To point out in very general fashion that there are injustices in the world – something which everybody knows without being told – that is not enough: agreed. Having stated principles, we must go to a map of the world and point out the critical points – geographical, sociological, cultural – where sin and injustice find their logment: also agreed. To do this, technologies are needed as instruments of analysis and action, and

ideologies are needed to program analysis and action so that they will actually dislodge and dismantle injustice: by all means agreed.

What role is left, then, for the inculcation of Christian values, for the Christian ethos? This: we cannot forget that technologies and ideologies, necessary though they are, derive their origin, historically, from a mixture of good and evil. Injustice of one kind or another finds in them too a local habitation and a name.

But not enough

Put it this way: they are tools, imperfect tools. And it is the Christian ethos, the Christian vision of values, that must use these tools while submitting them to judgment and relativizing their tendency to make absolutes of themselves. Relativizing them, putting them in their place, as it were, with full realization that the Christian ethos cannot possibly construct a new world without their assistance.

Forming men and women

With this background, let us now enter upon our second line of reflection, which bears on the formation of men and women who will reconcile these antitheses and thus advance the cause of justice in the modern world; their continuing formation, in the case of us “old timers,” their basic formation, in the case of the youth who will hopefully take up the struggle when we can do no more.

With regard to continuing education, let me say this: our alumni associations are called upon, in my opinion, to be a channel *par excellence* for its realization. Look upon it as *your* job, and, with the assistance of our Jesuits in the educational apostolate, work out concrete plans and programs for it.

Education and conversion

And let us not have too limited an understanding of what continuing education is. It should not be simply the updating of technical or professional knowledge, or even the re-education necessary to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. It should rather be what is most specific in Christian education: a call to conversion. And that means, today, a conversion that will prepare us for witnessing to justice as God gives us to see it from the signs of our times.

THE MEN AND WOMEN THE CHURCH NEEDS TODAY

Man or woman for others

What kind of man or woman is needed today by the Church, by the world? One who is a “man-or-woman-for-others.” That is my shorthand description. A man-or-woman-for-others. But does this not contradict the very nature of the human person? Are we not

each a “being-for-ourselves?” Gifted with intelligence that endows us with power, does we not tend to control the world, making ourselves its center? Is this not our vocation, our history?

Yes; gifted with conscience, intelligence and power each of us is indeed *a* center. But a center called to go out of ourselves, to give ourself to others in love -- love, which is our definitive and all-embracing dimension, that which gives meaning to all our other dimensions. Only the one who loves fully realizes himself or herself as a person. To the extent that any of us shuts ourselves off from others we do not become more a person; we becomes less.

Anyone who lives only for his or her own interests not only provides nothing for others. He or she does worse. They tend to accumulate in exclusive fashion more and more knowledge, more and more power, more and more wealth; thus denying, inevitably to those weaker than themselves their proper share of the God-given means for human development.

Make the world serve other men and women

What is it to humanize the world if not to put it at the service of mankind? But the egoist not only does not humanize the material creation, he or she dehumanizes others themselves. They change others into things by dominating them, exploiting them, and taking to themselves the fruit of their labor.

The tragedy of it all is that by doing this egoists dehumanizes themselves. They surrenders themselves with the possessions they covet; they become their slave – no longer persons who are self-possessed but un-persons, things driven by their blind desires and their objects.

But when we dehumanize, depersonalize ourselves in this way, something stirs within us. We feel frustrated. In our heart of hearts we know that what we have is nothing compared with what we are, what we can be, what we would like to be. We would like to be ourselves. But we dare not break the vicious circle. We think we can overcome our frustrations by striving to have more, to have more than others, to have ever more and more. We thus turn our lives into a competitive rat-race without meaning.

Dehumanization

The downward spiral of ambition, competition, and self-destruction twists and expands unceasingly, with the result that we are chained ever more securely to a progressive, and progressively frustrating, dehumanization.

Dehumanization of ourselves and dehumanization of others. For by thus making egoism a way of life, we translate it, we objectify it, in social structures. Starting from our individual sins of egoism, we become exploiters of others, dehumanizing them and ourselves in the process, and hardening the process into a structure of society which may

rightfully be called sin objectified. For it becomes hardened in ideas, institutions, impersonal and depersonalized organisms which now escape our direct control, a tyrannical power of destruction and self-destruction.

Vicious circle

How escape from this vicious circle? Clearly, the whole process has its root in egoism – in the denial of love. But to try to live in love and justice in a world whose prevailing climate is egoism and injustice, where egoism and injustice are built into the very structures of society – is this not a suicidal, or at least a fruitless undertaking?

Good in an evil world

And yet, it lies at the very core of the Christian message; it is the sum and substance of the call of Christ. Saint Paul put it in a single sentence: “Do not allow yourself to be overcome by evil, but rather, overcome evil with good.”² This teaching, which is identical with the teaching of Christ about love for the enemy, is the touchstone of Christianity. All of us would like to be good to others, and most of us would be relatively good in a good world. What is difficult is to be good in an evil world, where the egoism of others and the egoism built into the institutions of society attack us and threaten to annihilate us.

Under such conditions, the only possible reaction would seem to be to oppose evil with evil, egoism with egoism, hate with hate; in short, to annihilate the aggressor with his own weapons. But is it not precisely thus that evil conquers us most thoroughly? For then, not only does it damage us exteriorly, it perverts our very heart. We allow ourselves, in the words of Saint Paul, to be overcome by evil.

Love the driving force

No; evil is overcome only by good, hate by love, egoism by generosity. It is thus that we must sow justice in our world. To be just, it is not enough to refrain from injustice. One must go further and refuse to play its game, substituting love for self-interest as the driving force of society.

All this sounds very nice, you will say, but isn't it just a little bit up in the air? Very well, let us get down to cases. How do we get this principle of justice through love down to the level of reality, the reality of our daily lives? By cultivating in ourselves three attitudes:

Live more simply

First, a firm determination to live much more simply – as individuals, as families, as social groups – and in this way to stop short, or at least to slow down, the expanding spiral of luxurious living and social competition. Let us have men and women who will resolutely set themselves against the tide of our consumer society. Men and women who,

instead of feeling compelled to acquire everything that their friends have will do away with many of the luxuries which in their social set have become necessities, but which the majority of mankind must do without. And if this produces surplus income, well and good; let it be given to those for whom the necessities of life are still luxuries beyond their reach.

No unjust profit

Second, a firm determination to draw no profit whatever from clearly unjust sources. Not only that, but going further, to diminish progressively our share in the benefits of an economic and social system in which the regards of production accrue to those already rich, while the cost of production lies heavily on the poor. Let there be men and women who will bend their energies not to strengthen positions of privilege, but, to the extent possible, reduce privilege in favor of the underprivileged. Please do not conclude too hastily that this does not pertain to you – that you do not belong to the privileged few in your society. It touches everyone of a certain social position, even though only in certain respects, and even if we ourselves may be the victims of unjust discrimination by those who are even better off than ourselves. In this matter, our basic point of reference must be the truly poor, the truly marginalized, in our own countries and in the Third World.

Change unjust structures

Third, and most difficult: a firm resolve to be agents of change in society; not merely resisting unjust structures and arrangements, but actively undertaking to reform them. For, if we set out to reduce income in so far as it is derived from participation in unjust structures, we will find out soon enough that we are faced with an impossible task unless those very structures are changed.

Posts of power

Thus, stepping down from our own posts of power would be too simple a course of action. In certain circumstances it may be the proper thing to do; but ordinarily it merely serves to hand over the entire social structure to the exploitation of the egotistical. Here precisely is where we begin to feel how difficult is the struggle for justice; how necessary it is to have recourse to technical ideological tools. Here is where cooperation among alumni and alumni associations becomes not only useful but necessary.

Let us not forget, especially, to bring into our counsels our alumni who belong to the working class. For in the last analysis, it is the oppressed who must be the principal agents of change. The role of the privileged is to assist them; to reinforce with pressure from above the pressure exerted from below on the structures that need to be changed.

Christ a man for others

Men-and-women-for-others: the paramount objective of Jesuit education – basic, advance, and continuing – must now be to form such men and women. For if there is any substance in our reflections, then this is the prolongation into the modern world of our humanist tradition as derived from the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. Only by being a man-or-woman-for-others does one become fully human, not only in the merely natural sense, but in the sense of being the “spiritual” person of Saint Paul. The person filled with the Spirit; and we know whose Spirit that is: the Spirit of Christ, who gave his life for the salvation of the world; the God who, by becoming a human person, became, beyond all others, a Man-for-others, a Woman-for-others.

Footnotes:

1. Synod of Bishops 1971, “Justice in the World,” nn. 6, 37.
2. Ibid. n. 10.
3. Mt 25.40
4. Juan B. Alfaro, S.J. *Christianisme et Justice*, Commission Pontificale, Justice et Paix, Cite du Vatican, 1973, pp. 28
5. Acts 10.38
6. Rom 12.21