

A Call to Solidarity



in the Pacific

by Cardinal Thomas Williams



No. 4

ACSJC OCCASIONAL PAPER

Introduction

An important first anniversary occurred in 1989 — that of the most recent social encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concerns). The release of this encyclical provoked much controversy and discussion here in Australia and elsewhere.

Anniversaries are often marked by the Church. They are times for remembrance and reflection, for drawing lessons from what has gone before. This groundedness in history has been a particular feature of the social teachings of the Church.

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis celebrated the twentieth anniversary of Pope Paul VI's encyclical on the development of peoples (*Populorum Progressio*). Pope John Paul II updates and extends the theme of *Populorum Progressio* by surveying the 'signs of the times' and addressing the complex 'structures of sin' currently hindering full integral human development.

It was fitting therefore that the Archdiocese of Melbourne chose to celebrate the first anniversary of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* by discussing and reflecting upon it at a seminar.

Several hundred people attended (many travelling great distances to do so) and were treated to a diverse range of speakers, all exploring the meaning of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

International guests included Bishop Jorge Mejia, Vice President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, who gave two detailed and stimulating keynote addresses, and Cardinal Thomas Williams of New Zealand. Cardinal Williams, President of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference, and its Deputy for Justice and Peace, was invited to speak on the encyclical and Pacific solidarity.

Cardinal Williams' reflections were at once personal and analytical drawing as they do on years of experience in both New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

This is an edited version of Cardinal Williams' address as presented on his behalf by Mr Manuka Henare, Executive Secretary of the Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Development Aotearoa-New Zealand. Cardinal Williams was unfortunately prevented from attending in person by ill health.

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council is pleased to present Cardinal Williams' address as part of its series of **Occasional Papers**, and hopes that it will stimulate action and reflection on the implications of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* for Pacific solidarity.

Bishop W Brennan
Chairman ACSJC

Greetings

May I begin by acknowledging that I count myself privileged in having been invited to this seminar. You have a great range of men and women qualified in the Church's social teaching from which to select speakers, and there was not the need to import from further afield. But I am not disposed to protest.

I wanted to be here to learn all I could about this type of seminar and about its subject, the latest in a remarkable sequence of post-Vatican II social encyclicals. Hence my very real gratitude to the organisers for inviting me, and to Archbishop Little for making me so warmly welcome again to the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

There is another debt I wish to acknowledge, on my own behalf and on behalf of the six New Zealand dioceses. It is to the Australian Catholic Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development & Peace, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, and the earlier body, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace.

For a number of years now, we have greatly admired and respected the annual statements on social issues for their relevance, their quality presentation, and their insight into Catholic social teaching and its application to the national scene.

The Commission, and now the Council, have proved how fruitful ecumenical collaboration can be in addressing social issues. The joint statements have been superb.

That is not episcopal opinion only. I passed on Prison: The Last Resort to the then Chief District Court Judge in New Zealand. His reaction was to recommend it as a model approach in working for long-overdue penal reform in New Zealand.

But it is not only the annual statements from which we have learned. As recently as 1987 the Bishops Committee and Social Justice Council have drawn from the experience of the Church in the United States, and have brought into being a specifically Australian process of preparing social justice statements, based on the US Bishops' consultative model.

The Statement on The Distribution of Wealth in Australia is, I assure you in full sincerity, one we await with keen anticipation.

Just as the Australian Church with its 31 dioceses has been open to what can be learnt from the experience of the Church in the United States with its over 200 dioceses, so, too, the smaller Churches of the Pacific look to the Church in Australia for leadership in addressing issues which affect us all.

You have not failed us in giving effective leadership in the work for justice, peace and development and — here I'm confident I speak for the Pacific Islands and Papua-New Guinea and Solomons dioceses as well as the New Zealand dioceses — for that you have our profound gratitude.



Now to the Encyclical!

I doubt that any social encyclical has excited and fired me to the extent that *Sollicitudo rei socialis* has done.

That is not so much a comment on the encyclical as on myself.

I had been interested in the Church's social teaching since Young Christian Worker days in the late '40s and early '50s. That interest was intensified when I was lecturing on social ethics in Ireland in the early '60s. In the '70s I was in Western Samoa, and deeply involved in development, but in practice my area of interest was limited to the six villages which comprised the parish territory, and to a kind of here-and-now pragmatism. Back home from the Pacific, I tended to read the social encyclicals as if they applied only indirectly to my world — New Zealand — and as if they were really intended for places I tended to think of as less well off in material goods, less developed in terms of political and economic structures, and less advantaged as regards social welfare provisions, trade unions, and legislation in favour of human rights. *Mea maxima culpa!*

Becoming a bishop at the end of 1979 was bound to effect a change in my attitudes. Every bishop is compelled by the very responsibilities of office to depth the content of the Vatican II and post-Conciliar documents, and reflect them in his own teaching. They must be reflected in his pastoral planning in collaboration with diocesan pastoral council, diocesan commissions and agencies, and council of priests. Even so, I'd not given the social encyclicals the priority they warranted. Again: *mea maxima culpa!*

The social teachings are in place. It is up to the Catholic community to use them to illumine their own situation.

Then New Zealand began to go sour. Correction: then I began to notice New Zealand going sour. I'd immersed myself in other areas of the life and mission of the Church, and only belatedly became aware of the social pathology eroding the fabric of a once healthy if too-complacent nation. Yet again, *mea maxima culpa!*

Once awake to what was happening, I well realised that moral issues were involved . . . that what was happening could in no way be assessed in terms of purely political and economic criteria. But I needed trustworthy guidance if I was to fulfil my role as bishop. Pope Paul VI had provided the challenge in his letter *Octagesimo adveniens*, to mark the 80th anniversary of the first great social encyclical *Rerum novarum*:

It is up to the Christian communities to analyse with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgement and directives for action from the social teachings of the Church. (n.4).

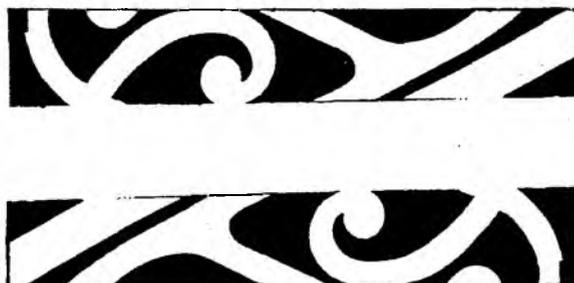
The social teachings were in place, certainly. It was up to the NZ Catholic community — laity, religious, clergy and bishop — to use them to illumine the New Zealand situation. Our National Commission for Evangelisation, Justice & Development (more recently re-named and remandated as the NZ Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace & Development) was striving to apply the principles, norms and directives derived from the gospel teachings. It is no exaggeration to admit — as I do guiltily and with shame — that, with the exception of small diocesan JPD Commissions and a sprinkling of parish JPD groups, the Catholic community as a whole was inert. Its sources tended to be papers and magazines, not popes and magisterium. Its vision was tele- rather than gospel. The media pundits received a respectful hearing, and the prophets received the customary clobbering.

The media pundits received a respectful hearing, and the prophets received the customary clobbering.

In the midst of all this, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* was for me a revelation. It was my own earlier obtuseness, I know well, that had led to my ignoring the relevance of the earlier encyclicals. It was otherwise with the new encyclical. I could not help but read it as if it had been written explicitly for New Zealand. As I absorbed each section, especially those in which Pope John Paul II developed his survey of the contemporary world, his theological reading of modern problems, and his guidelines, I found myself saying: "That's NZ! That is what's happening here! Those are our problems alright!"

Through the encyclical, I found myself theologically armed, as it were . . . and challenged to rally the troops and do battle. But to do that the encyclical has first to be made known and understood.

To learn from you how to share that knowledge and understanding is my main motive for accepting your invitation to be part of this seminar. However, I had better earn the right to receive from you by first giving to the extent I can some reflections on the Encyclical and its relevance to the Pacific.



Describing the Pacific

I'm unsure of the intentions of the seminar organisers, but I consider it best to confine the discussion to the region in which are the four groupings of dioceses usually spoken of as the Pacific episcopal conferences: Australia, the Pacific Islands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

Within the region, there are 73 dioceses (local Churches): 31 in Australia; 18 in Papua New Guinea, and 3 in the Solomons Islands; 15 in the 17 Pacific Island territories; and 6 in New Zealand.

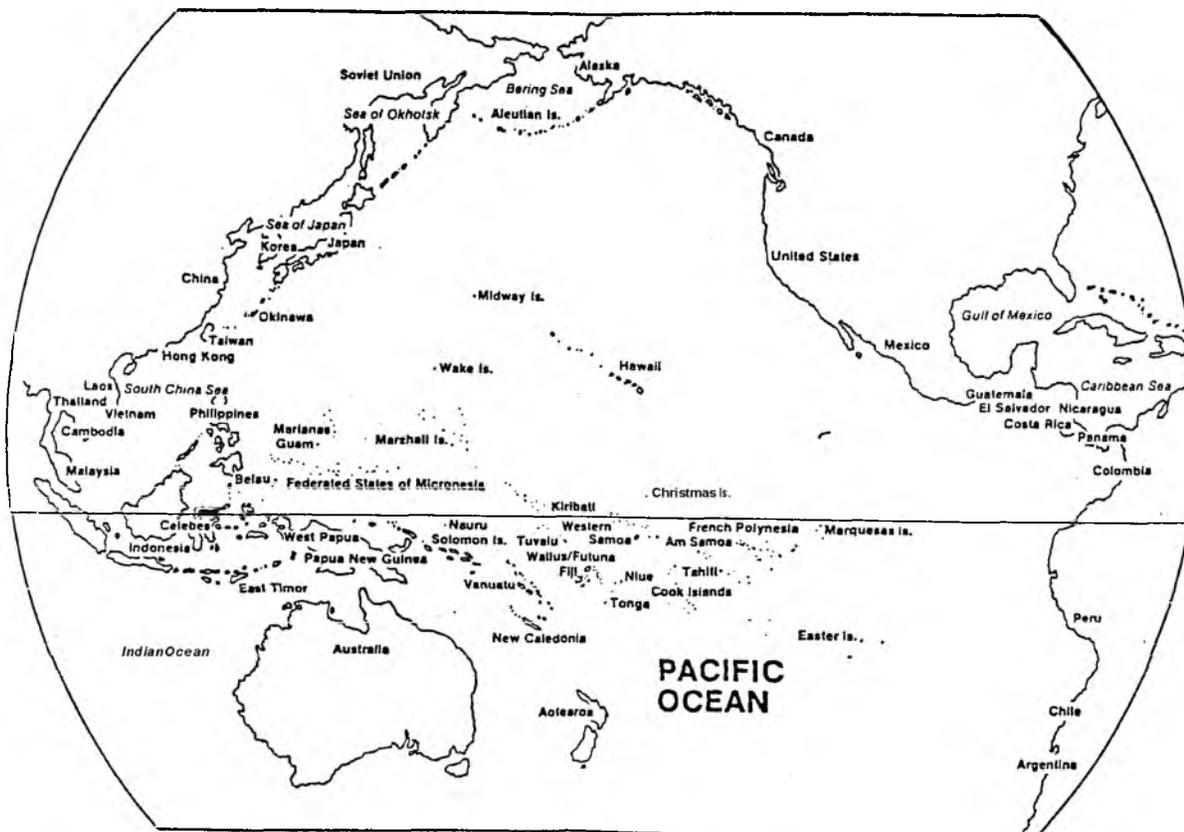
In terms of political entities, there are 21 in all. There are 3 French Overseas Territories, 4 US Territories (3 of which are self-governing), 1 US Trust Territory, 2 self-governing territories in free association with New Zealand, and 11 independent states (including a kingdom, 2 republics, a Commonwealth and a Dominion).

The region's total population is some 25 million. Its Catholic population is approximately 6.2 million.

In a submission to the Australian Episcopal Conference (now known as the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference) in 1979, the National Missionary Council described the salient features of those Pacific territories (not including Australia and New Zealand):

- Because of the smallness of the island populations . . . some 6 million scattered over a vast stretch of ocean covering 12 million square miles . . . the region is sometimes referred to as 'the forgotten part of the world'.
- Their isolation, together with the difficulties of communication between even neighbouring peoples, have resulted in an extraordinarily large number of mini-societies, cultures and languages (1200).

- The impact of such isolated peoples on the rest of the world has been slight, but the impact of the technologically advanced world upon the Pacific peoples has been and continues to be widespread and profound.
- As the process of decolonisation continues and Pacific peoples take their place in the family of nations, the mini-size of their states and economies, in contrast to the political, military and economic might of the super-powers, becomes starkly evident.
- Given the possibility of the strategic centre of the globe moving from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the presence of United States and French military bases in the region, there is increased diplomatic activity on the part of Russia and China in the South Pacific.
- The political and economic impotence of the mini-nations is indicated by the manner in which their protests at continual nuclear-weapons testing is ignored.
- The Pacific Islands' economies are vulnerable to exploitation and domination by the transnational corporations with their vast resources of capital and technology, since unaided the Pacific peoples are not able to carry out mineral exploitation, develop new sources of energy, or provide the basic infrastructures for a fishing industry, tourism, etc.
- The use of colonial languages, notably English and French, has been the means of communicating with much of the rest of the world, but also a means of cultural domination. So also is increasing access to Western mass media.



- All the Pacific Islands nations have adopted various Western administrative, medical, legal and educational institutions which are capital intensive, and depend for their functioning upon massive outside financial aid. This level of dependence is culturally inhibiting.
- Despite the geographical, linguistic, cultural and historical diversities that exist between the countries and the peoples of the Pacific region, there is also an underlying unity which has found expression in the South Pacific Forum, the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation, the South Pacific Commission, the University of the South Pacific, the South Pacific Games, South Pacific Festival of Arts, and the Pacific Council of Churches.
- The Catholic Church in the South Pacific has had, since 1969, its own hierarchy and increasingly indigenous leadership. Even so, only a little more than half (8 of 15) of the Central Pacific Ordinaries are indigenous, and but 5 of the 21 PNG & Solomon Islands bishops.



The Role of the Church

The moral challenge which confronts the Catholic Church in the Pacific region can be clearly identified as the protection of the rights of mini-peoples, cultures and languages in an age of political, military and economic super-powers, transnational corporations, and mass media of social communication.

With the exception of the Indians in Fiji and some other Asians, the peoples of the region are nearly all Christian. Their leaders are committed to neither the liberal capitalist nor the Marxist collectivist ideologies. Hence there is a unique opportunity for Christian leadership to defend the human rights and advance the human development of the peoples of the region.

While Catholics are a minority through the region, given our Church's commitment both to human development and to ecumenical collaboration, there is the opportunity also to develop effective ecumenical relationships as a sign of unity to a region striving for unity in the midst of its rich diversity.

Although the above analysis was prepared almost a decade ago, I believe it to be valid today.



The Pacific in the World Scene

Perhaps, given the increasing interdependence between nations and regions which Pope John Paul II emphasised in *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, the analysis should be extended.

The following factors warrant mention. They relate to dominant factors in the global context which impact on the well-being of the Pacific region.

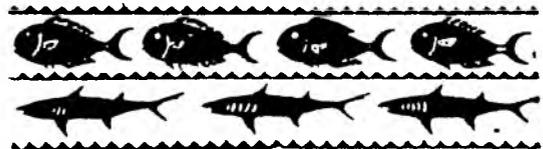
Material Poverty

The hundreds of millions of people driven to the margins of society to live in inhuman conditions of poverty and disease, have their counterpart in the Pacific Islands.

In the search for something better than subsistence, many family members, if not whole families, move to the main centres, away from the land, the cohesiveness of village life, and the customary authority structures which are the cement in the social fabric.

Not all find work. Most do not have the skills the labour market demands. If they obtain employment, it is the lowest paid — insufficient to provide adequate food and housing. The scale is different, but all the tragically dehumanising consequences of the urbanisation of rural peoples that are seen in Latin American and Asian cities, are present also in the Pacific.

Bishop Finau of Tonga speaks of the "smiling face of poverty in the Pacific". The plump mischievously grinning youngsters in the picture postcards and tourist brochures can serve to conceal the reality that lies beyond camera-range: malnutrition, other diseases related to inadequate diet, depleted lagoons, promotion of artificial baby foods over breastfeeding, problems associated with alcohol, and the damage wrought by hurricanes or prolonged dry seasons.



Economic Inequality

For all their proximity to Australia and New Zealand (which, in terms of *Populorum progressio* and *Sollicitudo rei socialis* are, despite geographical location, very much identified with the developed North rather than the developing South), the Pacific Islands exemplify the widening gap between North and South.

Some Island territories must be exempted from that observation. Where the requirements of military strategy demand bases and passive acquiescent population~the hand-outs are massive, and the standard of living and social services high. There is a price to be paid, of course.

Pope John Paul II expresses it succinctly when he comments that:

In the place of creative initiative there appears passivity, dependence and submission to the bureaucratic apparatus . . . This provokes a sense of frustration or desperation and predisposes people to opt out of national life, impelling many to migrate and also favouring a form of 'psychological' emigration.

(*Sollicitudo rei socialis*' n. 15)

The standard of living in a number of Pacific territories is maintained to a significant degree by monies remitted by family members who have emigrated to Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii and mainland United States.

Economic development is patchy. The growing and processing of tropical fruits, nuts and vegetables is a chancy business. Our Australian and New Zealand importers are much more concerned with shaving costs than with produce rotting in Island plantations. If the transnational company in Hawaii or South America can provide a product for a couple of cents per case cheaper, then let the villagers' produce rot!

The result is that the ordinary mass of Islands peoples have very little effective control over decisions affecting their life and their development. As a result, feelings of powerlessness and of being unable to shape their own destinies become pervasive.

Self-Determination

As those striving for a better, more independent, more just life become more aware of their basic rights, and become increasingly convinced that these will not be conceded voluntarily by those holding power over their future, there will be an upsurge of anger and frustration expressing itself in violence.

We have seen this in New Caledonia. The transmigration policies of the Indonesian government and the consequent displacement of the indigenous peoples of West Papua contain the seeds of bitter violence. So far, their main effect has been to create a tragic refugee problem for the Papua New Guinea border provinces.

Palau provides a further example of a super-power seeking to overturn the manifest will of the people expressed in a series of referenda.

Not in the South Pacific, you say! No? Three of the Islands territories have 2-year compulsory military training. Others have large military establishments which play a significantly dominant role in political and economic affairs. And who could have foretold three years ago that the largest of the independent territories after Papua New Guinea would take on the characteristics of a national security state?

Perhaps a comment in this context about New Zealand is in order.

New Zealand is hardly militaristic. Its total defence personnel number some 12700 in the three forces, and approximately 2700 civilians. The Defence Forces are best known for their community assistance (hydrographic survey services, fishery protection, search and rescue, and disaster relief).

Total expenditure of \$1,096 millions in 1987 amounted to 2.1% of Gross Domestic Product (compared with 3% in Australia, 5.2% in the United Kingdom, and 6.9% in the USA). With the withdrawal of the personnel based in Singapore, the only NZ troops outside the country will be those with the United Nations peace-keeping forces.

Even so, a fierce debate is mounting over the joint Australian-New Zealand frigate-building project. Those opposing it see the NZ expenditure of \$2 billion on four frigates as only possible at the expense of social spending.

The debate is being fueled by recent Government proposals to decrease expenditure on universal superannuation, and effectively to lower social welfare benefits by lowering the ratio of benefit to average ordinary wage.¹

Nuclear Issues

The nuclear menace continues. Nuclear weapons and a defence strategy based on them are the ultimate expression of militarism.

Since the present Labour Government in New Zealand came to power in 1984, New Zealand has continued to press for progress on a wide range of arms control and disarmament issues.

It is a signatory along with Australia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Niue, Cook Islands and Western Samoa, to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, first proposed by the Australian Labor Party in 1962 when in opposition.

From 1984 New Zealand has banned the entry of nuclear powered and/or nuclear armed warships into its ports. Legislative effect was given this policy when the Nuclear Free Zone Disarmament and Controls Act came into force in June 1987. That policy has earned New Zealand a few compliments, some vilification, and expulsion from ANZUS.

New Zealanders generally favour inclusion in ANZUS, but not at the expense of its nuclear free policy.

It is a prophetic stance, and I for one thank God for it. If I have a concern, it is that a later Government will sell out NZ's present nuclear policy for a mess of trade potage.

1. Despite adverse public opinion polls the New Zealand Government later in 1989 ordered two frigates from Australian shipbuilders, and has an option to purchase more.



Militarism

Globally there is a staggering growth in military spending. The language of papal encyclicals is traditionally moderate and measured. But in the new encyclical Pope John Paul II's condemnation of arms production, the arms trade and weapons stock-piling, is one that pulls no punches. They deal in death, and are clean opposed to true development which leads to more human life.

Worse, the growth in military spending is being matched by an increase in militarism — the process whereby military values, ideology and behaviour patterns achieve a dominant influence on the political, social, economic and external affairs of a country.

Militarism increases the plight of the poor by steering productivity and national spending away from basic human needs into military hardware, and by creating a climate of fear, distrust and helplessness.



The Environment

The realisation has come home to the Pacific nations that its material resources are finite. Globally the depletion of minerals and fossil fuels is being hastened by the voracious appetite of the industrial nations. The world's forest cover has been reduced by some 20% over the last quarter-century.

Absolutely vital to the smaller Pacific nations is the conservation of natural resources.

The Episcopal Conference of the Pacific spoke for the peoples of their countries when, in a letter to the members of the South Pacific Forum last July, they wrote:

We note that the inequality in economic terms which exists between the island countries of our region and the developed countries is striking. There is a moral issue here before which the Church, called upon to promote and witness to the unity of the whole human race, cannot remain indifferent.

Stemming from this inequality is the lessening of the sovereignty of our island nations in economic, political, social and cultural matters, and an undue dependence on others.

Yet the natural resources of the land and the sea have sustained our island peoples for many generations, and with careful and prudent exploitation, should continue to do so even more fruitfully in the future.

At the same time, there is a growing realisation that there are limits to available resources, and that there is a need to respect the integrity and cycles of nature and to take them into account when planning for development, rather than sacrificing them in favour of economic or political gains which are merely short-term or advantageous to only a few.

A true concept of development cannot ignore the use of the elements of nature, the renewability of resources and the consequences of haphazard industrialisation — three considerations which alert our consciences to the moral dimension of development.

The language is that of the Pacific Bishops. The thinking is that of *Populorum progressio* and *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.

Trade

Pope John Paul in *Sollicitudo rei socialis* called for "the reform of the international trade system, which is mortgaged to protectionism and increasing bilateralism", and added that "the international trade system frequently discriminates against the products of the young industries of the developing countries and discourages the producers of raw materials".

I know that from first-hand experience. In my parish in Western Samoa, the weekly collection from my 2,000 parishioners was less than \$10. The people just did not have the money. We kept the parish going by selling cocoa and whole coconuts from the parish plantation. The parishioners may have had no money, but they were certainly willing to work for the parish. But one week we would be receiving 6 sene (cents) per coconut, and the next week 1 sene. Harvesting cocoa is labour intensive. Some seasons it was worth our while to pick and split and soak and dry and sack and transport. In most seasons the price received didn't warrant the effort. Neither we nor the Western Samoan government had any control over prices. We ended up putting the cocoa plantation to the axe.

Pope John Paul II mentioned in the encyclical that it was desirable "that nations of the same geographical area should establish forms of co-operation which will make them less dependent on more powerful producers". How is that possible in our geographical area when in trade relationships there is no way that Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands, however much they co-operate, can achieve anything worthwhile in the face of the economic power of the "more powerful producers" Australia and New Zealand? It suits our two countries of the economic "North" to shelter behind free-trade, anti-protectionist policies because of the advantages to be gained vis-a-vis other major trading nations, regardless of the plight of the Island nations. Because interdependence in trading relationships is not recognised by the two developed countries in our region, neither is solidarity.

"North" continues to keep "South" in economic dependence and bondage. There is not the will on the part of the developed nations to do anything effective about the injustice of the present order.



Racism

The final global factor which, I believe, impacts on the Pacific region is the persistence of racism. Racial stereotyping still divides and victimises people in many countries, including our own, where different ethnic groups live side by side.

One of New Zealand's Anglican Bishops, the Most Reverend Godfrey Wilson, summarised the problem in these words:

Racist attitudes are also revealed in the global policies of nations. (An interesting question: would the French and Americans have tested nuclear weapons on Pacific islands had those islands been the ancestral homes of Europeans?)

Above all dominant ethnic groups are reluctant to acknowledge the structural, systemic nature of racism. It is difficult to persuade those who are not on the receiving end of injustice that a society's economic, political and social institutions can be racist in their structure and operation, in that people do not enjoy equal opportunity and treatment from them by reason of their racial origin.

(Paper prepared for annual meeting of NZ Anglican and Catholic Bishops, November 1983).



New Zealand Impact

Lest I have given the impression that the difficulties in the Pacific are all with the developing nations, let me say that, whatever about the Australian scene, New Zealand is in serious strife.

In New Zealand we are seeing our democratic tradition being eroded in ways both subtle and blatant. Economic power is becoming concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. While 'big business' waxes fat and returns astronomical profits, unemployment has reached levels comparable with those of the 1930s depression.

The trade unions, after their long struggle to win recognition of basic rights for workers, are losing their power, and the impact of their advocacy in social issues is greatly diminished.



There is developing a depressed under-class of people who are typically unemployed or under-employed, young, poorly educated, unskilled, and disproportionately brown-skinned. Their feelings of alienation and anger carry within them the seeds of violence and conflict. The welfare state is crumbling. The level of benefits is threatened by the government's need to cut spending and lower its deficit.

The health care and hospital system which was once freely accessible to all is developing into a dual system: private for those who can afford it, and public for those who cannot. Racism in different forms continues to impede genuine partnership between Maori and Pakeha.



Social Teachings

From time to time, I find myself cast in the role of a critic of Government. I am not comfortable in that role, but the matters I have addressed have been moral questions involving human rights and human well-being.

With all my heart I accept that "the teaching and spreading of her social doctrine are part of the Church's evangelising mission". (*Sollicitudo rei socialis* n.41.)

In no way can I accept that the Church's social teaching is abstract theory, confined to the halls of academia or to erudite study groups. I refuse to see the three components of social doctrine other than as, in practice, an inseparable whole: "a set of principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and directives for action".

But our convictions as to social doctrine as an integral part of the Church's mission do not win friends.

I readily and willingly accept Pope John Paul II's emphasis on the reality of the human condition and the commitment to justice. In these things I am no different from my fellow bishops.

But our convictions as to social doctrine as an integral part of the Church's mission do not win friends.

Political parties of both Right and Left are uneasy with any activity on the part of the Church which suggests that religion belongs to the modern world and has something to say to contemporary society.

They are much more comfortable with a Church that gives the appearance of being an historical relic, a thing of the past, rendered impotent by its curious and out-worn traditions.

They are suspicious of any signs of a renewed vitality, any hint that the Church is able to influence the people's attitude to the way the nation is structured and governed.

Generally their view is that, unless religion can be made to serve political interests, it must be treated as a purely private affair, offering no serious challenge to the dominant political ideology.

I have to wonder, even so, whether our real difficulty is with those who exercise political power, or with our own Catholic people.

Role of the Laity

Pope John Paul II speaks in the encyclical of the commitment to justice being exercised by the Church "accordingly to each individual's role, vocation and circumstances" (n.41).

He allows no cop-outs:

In this commitment, the sons and daughters of the church must serve as examples and guides, for they are called upon, in conformity with the programme announced by Jesus himself in the synagogue of Nazareth, to 'preach good news to the poor . . . to proclaim release to captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord' (Lk 4: 18-19).

It is appropriate to emphasise the preeminent role that belongs to the laity, both men and women, as was reaffirmed in the recent Assembly of the Synod. It is their task to animate temporal realities with Christian commitment, by which they show that they are witnesses and agents of peace and justice. (n.47)

How far is that heeded in the dioceses of Australia and New Zealand?

I can speak only for New Zealand. There, far too few accept in practice what Pope John Paul is teaching.

The work for justice, development and peace is seen as not quite respectable, it prods the conscience, it calls into question life-style, business practices, personal priorities. So when a social encyclical is published, selective deafness sets in.

The response, if any, is to all intents and purposes expressed in the immortal words of Neddy Seagoon: "I don't wish to know that!"



The result is pulpit platitudes that won't rock the boat or affect the collection, small diocesan justice, development and peace commissions, elephantine memories regarding any cent granted at any time to any cause that wasn't squeaky clean in terms of social respectability, snide attacks in the correspondence columns of the Catholic press, and parishes remarkably generous in providing ambulances at the bottom of the cliff but impervious to the need for fences at the top.

(We even have one weekly which actively seeks to destroy the NZ Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Development, and to wreck the Bishops' Lenten Appeal.)

Now it is precisely in this area of formation in social teaching that the work for solidarity in the Pacific must be based.

Unless we can achieve within each diocese and within each of our two countries some general understanding and acceptance of the church's social teaching . . . unless we have a consensus within our local Churches as to the mission for justice and peace, and resolute support for those at the forefront of that work . . . unless, in other words, we have solidarity within, we will have nothing to offer in solidarity with the Pacific dioceses and nations. Our voices will be muted, the Church's social teaching summarily dismissed as a minority extremist stance, and attempts to redress wrongs and transform unjust structures rendered impotent.



Solidarity

Australia and New Zealand need to assist one another in this. I suspect we share the same difficulties. It goes beyond sharing information spasmodically. I believe we should collaborate at a level where together we can initiate joint action in the area of formation.

A second element in solidarity in the Pacific is to support unreservedly the Pacific Partnership for Human Development.

It is a true partnership.

Long past is the traditional donor-recipient relationship in development aid. Every member-Church gives; every member-Church receives. Every member-Church teaches; every member-Church learns.

Together needs are identified, together development plans are devised, together action is taken. It is Pacific solidarity at its best. That solidarity radiates beyond the Pacific region. Catholic development agencies in the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Ireland and Canada are involved along with the development agencies in the four Pacific episcopal conference areas.

We have in the Pacific Partnership for Human Development an organisation that richly deserves to be better known and proudly claimed by the Catholic people of Australia and New Zealand.

A third element in practical solidarity is the collaboration between the four episcopal conferences of the region.

We have a federation of Pacific bishops' conferences 'on the books', as it were, but having shaped the clay, we have not yet breathed life into it.

And so, for example the Episcopal Conference of the Pacific has to try to make its voice heard in protesting pollution of Islands' waters by nuclear waste. The Papua New Guinea and Solomons Islands Conference has to try to combat the West Papua refugee situation.

If we receive with gratitude and respect from those to whom we once gave, that too is solidarity.

Co-ordinated action on the part of all four Conferences would mightily increase effectiveness. We have the same social teaching to guide us, we make the same judgment as to the existence of injustice and oppression, and yet we say nothing together. It is time we began to speak as one in solidarity.

(I hasten to say in making that comment on the federation of episcopal conferences remaining inactive, that in no way am I assigning blame. I am as guilty as anyone, and more, for the lack of progress.)²

2. The members of the four bishops' conferences are to meet in Sydney in May 1990 to finalise the federation's constitution and to initiate its work.

A further requirement of solidarity, in the case of New Zealand at least, is that we campaign to increase Government overseas aid. The United Nations has set a target of 0.7% of aid volume to Gross National Product. The New Zealand government set its sights lower. In 1986 it decided to adopt a target for official development assistance of 0.51% of GNP by 1990-91. Its present level is 0.27%.

On the positive side, ambassadors of solidarity are the Paulian Association Lay Missionary Society (PALMS) and Catholic Overseas Volunteer Service (COVS) workers and our missionary personnel. But we need to be aware that true solidarity involves recognition of what the peoples among whom our fellow Australians and New Zealanders work have to offer us.

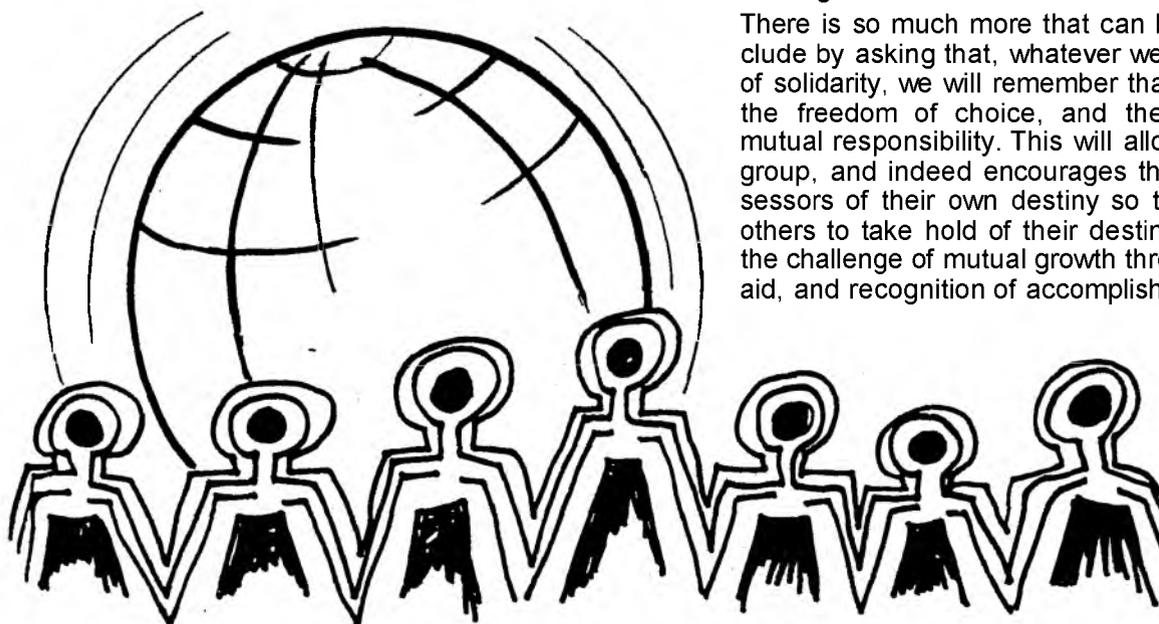
The fresh vitality of the younger Churches should not remain a hidden treasure, an untapped resource.

Solidarity requires that we share the best of what we are achieving, so that others may be supported and encouraged in their own efforts.

As vigorous Island communities grow within our New Zealand parishes, and as Pacific Islanders are ordained from our diocesan seminary, we have to revise our former categories relating to 'missions' and 'missionaries'. If we receive with heartfelt gratitude and profound respect from those to whom we once gave, that too is solidarity.

Finally, solidarity requires that we share the best of what we are achieving, so that others may be supported and encouraged in their own efforts. New Zealand has more to receive than to give, but I believe we may be able to offer a little from our experiences in the search for genuinely bi-cultural relationships, in the attempt to remedy long-standing injustices through our Waitangi Tribunal, and in the effort to devise a renewed social policy for our nation. Freely sharing ideas and experience, one diocese with another in the region, is as much an expression of solidarity, I believe, as the sharing of material resources and personnel.

There is so much more that can be said. Let me conclude by asking that, whatever we attempt in the spirit of solidarity, we will remember that solidarity demands the freedom of choice, and the sensitivity born of mutual responsibility. This will allow every person and group, and indeed encourages them, to become possessors of their own destiny so that they can enable others to take hold of their destinies in a response to the challenge of mutual growth through mutual respect, aid, and recognition of accomplishment.



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