Thornton Hall Prison: Solution or Problem?

Tony O'Riordan SJ

John on the Prison Carousel

Having completed a nine-month sentence, John was released from Mountjoy Prison in March 2007. For the entire duration of his imprisonment, John was 'on protection', because of fears for his safety. This meant that he spent twenty-three, and sometimes almost twenty-four, hours each day locked up in a cell on his own. When he was released he had no place to live. Homeless and adrift, he began to drink heavily and to abuse prescription drugs. Over the next few weeks, he was arrested several times for being drunk and disorderly and for shoplifting.

In June 2007, he was committed to Cloverhill Prison and spent two months there awaiting sentence – again on twenty-three hour lock-up. After two months, he appeared in court and received a three-month sentence. He was then transferred to Mountjoy Prison, but since his sentence had been backdated to include the two months he had already spent on remand in Cloverhill, and since he was also entitled to remission, he was released after just one day.

Back on the streets, he tried to make a new start but by late September he was once more in Cloverhill Prison awaiting trial, again for the same type of offences. After a two-week remand, the court sentenced him to a month's imprisonment. So again he was transferred to Mountjoy, where he spent less than a week.

Now released, he is once more homeless, though trying to link in with support services that might help. He is also facing two more charges for offences he is alleged to have committed during summer 2007 and it is possible that he will be back in Mountjoy again before Christmas.

So far, then, in 2007 John has been in two separate prisons, and has spent close on two hundred days behind bars, spread over three separate periods. This has cost the prison service about €60,000;[1] the Court Service costs and the cost of Garda time involved in arresting, questioning, charging and sentencing John would no doubt amount to substantial additional sums.

During the course of his time in prison, John never saw a counsellor, a probation officer or attended any training or education programmes. This is despite the fact that he has a serious drink problem, is addicted to drugs and has no formal educational qualifications. The only rehabilitative measure he accessed was his daily dose of methadone. Even were he to have had contact with support and rehabilitative services in prison, it is open to question whether they could have made any real impact over such short periods of time in two separate prisons.

Not a Unique Experience

The imprisonment of John is highly questionable, having been both ineffective and extremely expensive. The authorities might argue that his imprisonment was a measure of last resort, given his multiple personal and social problems. But imprisoning John was a matter of last resort only because of the inadequacy of supports in the community to address his addictions and his housing needs.

The pattern evident in John's story is mirrored in the case of many others sent to prison. Repeated short spells in increasingly violent prisons for relatively minor offences are now significant features of the Irish penal system.

Moreover, the kind of personal and social problems which blight John's life are all too often the experience of those who are imprisoned. Studies of people in prison in Ireland have consistently shown that a very high proportion come from poor socio-economic circumstances and have benefited little from schooling; many have faced family break-up in childhood; many also have experience of homelessness and/or of living in insecure accommodation; disproportionate numbers suffer some form of mental illness and are addicted to alcohol and/or illicit drugs.

A Brand New Prison at Thornton Hall

In the face of the reality of the short time a majority of those imprisoned spend in prison, and of the social and economic deprivation that

underlies much of the crime in our society, what major initiative is being planned by those responsible for our penal policy? Disappointingly, it is to build the largest prison complex ever seen in this State[2] – and at the same time increase the number of prison places provided.

Of course, the initiative is not being presented as such: rather, it is described as a project to build a new prison to replace unsatisfactory prison buildings. Thus, the Minister for Justice, Brian Lenihan TD, stated in July 2007: 'The new prison at Thornton is badly needed to replace the Dickensian conditions [of Mountjoy] … and to ensure that those committed to prisons can be kept in a safe and secure environment with the facilities necessary to encourage their rehabilitation.'[3]

A plan to provide improved physical facilities for those imprisoned is, naturally, to be welcomed. However, in this article I argue that there are several grounds on which we should question the proposed new development.[4]

Firstly, the new prison at Thornton Hall will represent a continuance of the dominant feature of Irish penal policy over the past decade – which has been to increase the number of prison places, and to increase the number of people detained, while failing to radically develop alternative sentences that would offer a better opportunity to address the personal and social problems experienced by a high proportion of those who come before the courts.

Secondly, from what we know about the plans for the new complex, it appears that the opportunity to design the buildings in a way that would lessen the threat of prisoner violence seems to have been passed up.

Thirdly, the Thornton Hall plans regarding facilities for pre-release male prisoners, for women, and for young people under eighteen, represent regressive steps in our penal policy in relation to these groups.

Adding Still More to Prison Capacity

Up to 1,400 prisoners will be held within the walls of the 150-acre site at Thornton Hall. Currently, the total average number of prisoners held in the Mountjoy complex, which Thornton Hall is intended to replace, is 860. Building this new and larger prison will therefore add a further 540 prison places, representing a capacity increase of over 60 per cent on what is currently available in Mountjoy.

This will add to the significant expansion in prison places that has already occurred during the past decade. The opening of four new prisons – Castlerea Prison (1997), Dochas Centre (1999), Cloverhill Prison (2000), and the Midlands Prison (2001) – resulted in an extra 1,000 prison places.[5] Improvements and extensions have taken place in Limerick Prison, Shelton Abbey, and Loughan House; a new wing is currently being built in Wheatfield Prison. Close to €250 million has been spent on building, expanding and refurbishing prisons.

The story of John, and of many more people like him, shows that all too often, 'prison doesn't work'

This building programme has undoubtedly resulted in facilities that offer better physical conditions for prisoners: that is, of course, welcome. However, in terms of overall penal policy, it could be argued that the key outcome of the 'prison building boom' of the last ten years is not so much the replacement of outdated prison buildings as the creation of greater prison capacity. This 'capacity creep' is one of the reasons people question the building not just of the Thornton Hall complex but of a new prison outside Cork city.

Unsurprisingly, more and more people are coming into prison to fill the places that have been added. The average number of people in prison on any given day rose from 2,121 in 1995 to 3,151 in 2005, representing an increase of over 50 per cent.[6] On 2 November 2007, the total prisoner population, including people on remand, and those detained under immigration rules, was 3,342.[7]

Scope for Reducing the Use of Imprisonment

Instead of looking to increase the capacity of our prisons, I would argue strongly that we should be examining how we could reduce the number of prison places, and develop alternative penalties as a more appropriate and effective way of dealing

with those who come before the courts.

I suggest, further, that an analysis of the length of the majority of sentences imposed by the courts, and of the type of crimes for which people are currently in prison, shows that there is significant scope for reducing the use of imprisonment and the number of prison places provided.

For How Long are People sent to Prison?
In 2005, the latest year for which there are published statistics, 40 per cent of people sentenced to imprisonment received sentences of three months or less; eight out of every ten people sentenced received prison terms of less than twelve months.[8]

Most sentences of imprisonment in that year were for crimes at the lower end of the scale of gravity: over 60 per cent (3,050) were for offences in these categories and 85 per cent were for non-violent offences.[9]

Consistent with this pattern of short sentences of imprisonment being used as the punishment for less serious offences, is the fact that it is the district courts – that is, the courts which deal with less serious crimes – which are responsible for imposing up to 80 per cent of all sentences of imprisonment. (These courts deal with offences such as public order offences, minor drug offences, road traffic offences, criminal damage, littering and failure to have a television licence.)

For What are People sent to Prison?
We can also get an understanding of the use we make of imprisonment if we look at the situation on a particular day. A written answer to a parliamentary question, provided in Dáil Éireann on 6 November 2007, gives an interesting snapshot.[10] The information made available relates to the situation on 2 November 2007 and shows how many people were in prison on that day, as well as giving a breakdown, in nine categories, of the offences for which they were serving a sentence (see Table 1 below).

Of the 3,342 prisoners in custody on 2 November, 2,641 (80 per cent) were serving a sentence; the remaining 701 were either on remand (awaiting trial or sentence) or detained at the request of the immigration authorities.

The breakdown of offences for which the 2,641 people serving a sentence were convicted is not very detailed and in some cases a category could include both serious and minor offences. For example, 'Drug Offences' could range from possession of cannabis for personal use to possession of major quantities with intent to supply.

However, on the basis of the information provided, we know that there are almost as many people in prison for road traffic offences as there are for murder. We also know that if the figures for imprisonment for offences such as theft, shoplifting and criminal damage were combined, the resultant total (647) would be higher than the combined figure for imprisonment for murder, manslaughter and sexual offences (538).

Currently, then, for every ten prisoners serving a sentence for one of the most serious offences

Table I: Prisoners Serving Sentences by Offence Category, 2 November 2007

Offence Category	Total	Percentage
Murder	226	9
Manslaughter	82	3
Sexual offences	230	9
Other offences against the person	373	14
Offences against property with violence	93	4
Offences against property without violence	647	24
Drug offences	435	16
Road traffic offences	190	7
Other	365	14
	2641	**100**

Source: *Dáil Debates*, 6 November 2007 (Vol. 640, No. 6).

(murder, manslaughter and sexual offences) there are twelve in prison for property crimes without violence.

1,000 Fewer Prison Places?

The information given in Table 1 allows only some cautious conclusions. If we were to define imprisonment as being 'warranted' in the case of offences in the first five categories – namely, murder; manslaughter; sexual offences; 'other offences against the person'; 'offences against property with violence' – then we would conclude that the imprisonment of at least 40 per cent of those in prison under sentence in November 2007 was 'warranted'. If we were to go further and regard all crimes in the category 'Drug Offences' as serious and meriting imprisonment then 'warranted' prison sentences would rise to 55 per cent.

If we were to regard the remaining categories – namely 'property crime without violence', 'road traffic offences' and 'other' – as including offences not generally of sufficient seriousness to merit a prison sentence, then the imprisonment of at least 45 per cent of the people in prison under sentence in November 2007 could be described as 'unwarranted'.

Of course, much more detailed information and analysis would be required before any firm conclusions about the extent of 'unwarranted' use of imprisonment could be made. However, what can be drawn from this (admittedly tentative) analysis is that if a decision were to be made to use prison for only the most serious offences there could possibly be a reduction of around 1,000 in the number of prison places needed. This would obviously mean there would be no need for further expansion in current prison capacity. Surely, this possibility merits serious consideration?

Remand and Immigration Detention

A policy of reducing the use of imprisonment would also rigorously examine how we use imprisonment for those awaiting trial (remand) and for those detained at the request of the immigration authorities. At present, it appears that there are around 700 people from these categories in prison.

Changes to the law relating to bail introduced following a referendum to amend the Constitution in 1996 have increased the need for prison spaces by about 600. The principal reason for tightening

Only a minority of prison sentences are imposed by the higher courts *© JCFJ*

the bail laws was a belief that some offenders were taking advantage of being free on bail to go on a spree of committing crime – on the basis that imprisonment was in any case inevitable as a consequence of the crimes for which they had already been charged. Before expanding our prison capacity further it would be prudent to know how effective this expansion in remand imprisonment has been in reducing crime.

No clear information is available on the extent to which migrants and asylum seekers – who have not committed any crime – are being detained in prison at the request of the immigration authorities. The data supplied to Dáil Éireann on 6 November 2007 does not give a figure for this group. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that on any given day somewhere between thirty and fifty prison spaces could be used for the detention of people under immigration legislation.

Need for a Different Direction in Policy

Few disagree with the official position that some of our prison buildings are so old and dilapidated that they are unfit to accommodate prisoners, let alone provide a suitable place for rehabilitation and a humane environment for both staff and prisoners. Moreover, few would disagree that the new buildings and facilities offer a better prospect of improving prison regimes.

However, it is evident that to an alarming degree the provision of new prison buildings over the past decade has come to be equated with building additional prison places. This is in spite of the evidence that to a significant extent prison is being used to detain people for short periods and for crimes that are at the less serious end of the scale. It is also in spite of the evidence of the ineffectiveness of prison as a solution to crime.

Research has shown that of the nearly 20,000 people released from prison between 2001 and 2004 almost one third were back in prison within a year and almost half were in prison within four years.[11]

It is clear that there is in Ireland a continued failure to make imprisonment just one element of a comprehensive penal policy, which would seek to develop non-custodial penalties focused on restitution and rehabilitation, and also to ensure that former prisoners were given every opportunity following release to rebuild their lives and avoid further criminal involvement. As they stand, the proposals in relation to Thornton Hall hold out little prospect that the radical change of policy that is needed is about to take place anytime soon.

There are almost as many people in prison for road traffic offences as there are for murder

Prevention of Violence in the New Prison

A second area of concern in regard to the proposals for Thornton Hall is that the design apparently being considered may do little to address one of the more serious problems that Irish prisons now face – a high incidence and a serious level of violence among prisoners.

The reality is that today significant numbers of those whom society incarcerates are exposed to the risk of intimidation, abuse, serious injury or even death while in prison.

A report released in October 2007 by an international watchdog on prison conditions stated that: 'at least three of the prison establishments visited can be considered as unsafe, both for prisoners and for prison staff': these were Mountjoy Prison, Limerick Prison, and St Patrick's Institution. The report goes on to say that: 'Stabbings and assaults with various objects are frequent and many prisoners met by the delegation bore the marks of such incidents'.[12]

The report echoes widespread concern about the extent of inter-prisoner violence in Irish prisons. Aware of the threat of assault or attack, many prisoners inform prison authorities of their fears for their safety. In response, prisoners are placed 'on protection' – indeed, it seems that this is the principal way in which the authorities deal with these threats of violence.

In nearly all cases, prisoners on protection are kept locked in their cells for twenty-three hours a day. In May 2007, it was reported in the media that there were seventy prisoners on protection in Mountjoy Prison.[13] Being 'on protection' means that prisoners do not have access to education or recreation and the whole experience of being in prison becomes even more damaging.

The culture of violence within prison calls for a range of measures. One element of a possible response lies in the design of prisons: small units providing a full range of facilities in self-contained areas could represent an important part of the solution to this serious problem. Yet, despite the opportunity that is being presented by the building of a new prison on a spacious campus, it seems that the option of having smaller units is not going to be adopted at Thornton Hall. Instead, it appears that the two main prison buildings on the complex will each accommodate between 400 and 500 male prisoners.

If these buildings proceed as proposed, with common facilities, such as visiting areas, exercise areas and educational facilities, shared by hundreds of prisoners, it will mean it is very likely that threats of intimidation and violence will 'infect' the regime of the new prison. As a result, large numbers of prisoners will be 'on protection', and will be unable to avail of the rehabilitative services that it is promised will be an important feature of the new complex.

Facilities that should be Located Elsewhere

A third area of concern regarding Thornton Hall is that the proposed complex is to include facilities that would be better located in their existing or alternative sites. Not all buildings on the Mountjoy site need replacement and there are good reasons for arguing that it would be better to leave both the Training Unit for male prisoners and the women's prison in their current locations. It would most definitely be better not to include, as is proposed, a facility for young people under

eighteen in the Thornton Hall complex.

The Training Unit in Mountjoy

The Training Unit, a semi-open prison for pre-release prisoners which was completed in 1976, is in good physical condition. Furthermore, it is recognised that this facility is one of the best functioning prisons in the country. It has a very progressive regime that is widely acknowledged to assist those who have been detained there to integrate back into society following their release.

Many of the prisoners in the Training Unit leave the prison each day to work in jobs which they have been facilitated to obtain, and which offer the possibility of continued employment once they are released. The relocation of this prison to a site far outside the city centre will pose a serious challenge to this very positive aspect of the Training Unit's regime.

Dochas Centre

As with the Training Unit, the demolition of the Dochas Centre, the women's prison located in the Mountjoy complex, and its replacement by a building on the Thornton Hall site, is not motivated by the need to improve physical conditions and provide a better regime for prisoners but, rather, by economic considerations – the enhancement of the value of the Mountjoy site when it goes on sale for re-development.

A significant advantage of the present location of Dochas is that it is close to where the children and other family members of many of the women prisoners live. If the prison is moved to Thornton Hall, visiting those detained will be much less convenient for their families and children. It is likely also that they will have to travel there by prison bus, as there is no public transport to Thornton Hall. (Indeed, the need for this prison bus is potentially one of the most negative elements of the impact of the Thornton Hall proposal on the families of prisoners. Having to use such a service will add to the sense of stigma that families of prisoners already feel. The hour-long journey from the city centre will allow easy identification of the families of prisoners and possibly give rise to bullying and intimidation by those who may seek to use these visitors to smuggle contraband into the prison.)

Community opposition to the new prison *© JCFJ*

The Dochas Centre is acknowledged as operating a very progressive regime. The Centre is well designed; although part of the Mountjoy complex, it is located on the periphery of the site, has its own entrance and is essentially a separate prison. It was designed so that small numbers of women can live together in 'houses'. Each house has approximately twelve single bedrooms and contains domestic-style cooking and laundry facilities.

It seems that the design qualities of the Dochas Centre will be transferred to Thornton Hall. However, it will be a bigger prison, thus adding to the likelihood that more female offenders will be imprisoned.

This would be an extremely retrograde step. If we consider the profile of women prisoners it is evident that there is scope to reduce the use of imprisonment for women and furthermore to reduce the extent to which those imprisoned are detained in secure closed prisons. Most women detained in the Dochas Centre are young, unemployed, inner-city women with addiction problems who are sentenced to short terms of imprisonment.

A 2003 study of committals to the Dochas Centre for the twelve-month period 25 September 2000 to 25 September 2001 pointed out that:

... more women were imprisoned in the relevant year for larceny, robbery and stealing than for any other offence. The next most frequently occurring offences were Drunk and Disorderly, or Breach of the Peace type offences. A large number of women deemed to be aliens were committed to the prison that year. Also striking is the number of women imprisoned on assault charges, one third of them for assaulting a Garda; and equally striking is the very small number of women imprisoned for

murder or domestic violence charges. Perhaps the most striking feature of the analysis is the relatively trivial nature of the offences for which many of the women were imprisoned, either awaiting trial or having been sentenced. [14]

At present, all women detained in Ireland – irrespective of the seriousness of their offence, or whether they are on remand awaiting trial or whether they are very young or whether they are detained under the rules of the immigration system – are held in a secure closed prison. This contrasts with the situation for male prisoners who may at least have the possibility of being detained in less highly secure or even open prisons.

If the women's prison is to be moved to Thornton Hall, then the planning process for this should ensure that the building of a new prison is not seized on as an opportunity to expand the number of places provided. Instead, the building of a new closed centre should be accompanied by the development of one or more open centres, with special consideration being given to the needs young women offenders.

Detaining Children in Thornton Hall

One of the most objectionable aspects of the proposals regarding the Thornton Hall complex is the inclusion of a facility for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds in what is supposed to be an adult prison complex.

This is despite the fact that the detention of young people who are still legally children (that is, are under the age of eighteen years) in adult prisons has been one of the most shameful features of the Irish penal system and is in contravention of Ireland's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 2006, a total of 165 young people under the age of eighteen were imprisoned; most were held in St Patrick's Institution, which holds young offenders up to the age of twenty-one.[15]

The Irish Government has given repeated commitments to end the practice of detaining those under eighteen alongside adults. The Children Act 2001 (as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 2006) allows for the extension of the use of 'children detention schools', which are currently only for those aged fifteen and younger, so that they could be used for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds. This would mean that all those aged under eighteen could be removed from the prison system. The proposal to build a facility for young people aged sixteen and seventeen as part of the new Thornton Hall prison complex runs directly counter to this decision.

In April 2006, an Expert Group was established to 'initiate and oversee the planning needed to give effect to the extension of the children detention school model'.[15] It is widely expected that as a result of the Group's deliberations, the Irish Youth Justice Service will provide a new centre specifically for the purpose of the detention of sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds.

Why do we need to build a facility for young people in Thornton Hall if another statutory agency will probably shortly afterwards (if not at the same time) commence building an identical facility at a more appropriate location? It is not a sufficient response to the concerns raised that the Minister for Justice should try to justify the proposed facility for under-eighteens at Thornton Hall by describing it as temporary and 'purely a precautionary measure' and by saying that 'the accommodation can be used by adults in due course.'[16]

Currently, young people under eighteen detained in St Patrick's Institution are housed in a dedicated and refurbished section of the centre. This section includes a multi-million euro school completed in 2003, which only came into operation in April 2007. Rather than proceed with the proposed new centre for young people under eighteen at Thornton Hall, it would be preferable to enhance the existing special section of St Patrick's Institution and staff it with a child care team, so when there are no longer adult prisoners in Mountjoy, this could become the temporary facility that is claimed to be needed.

Conclusion

At first sight, the proposal to replace the Victorian edifice that is Mountjoy Prison with a new prison, Thornton Hall, on a site that will be fifty times the size of Croke Park might seem reasonable, progressive and even laudable.

However, many reasonable people who know at close hand the realities of how imprisonment operates are dismayed by the proposal to greatly expand the number of prison places, thereby serving to reinforce the dominance of imprisonment in Irish society's response to crime.

The story of John, and of many more people like

him, shows that all too often, 'prison doesn't work'. Increasing prison capacity alone is not going to 'make prison work' for John or indeed for the large number of other people who repeatedly come into prison, serve a short sentence, are released into social circumstances that are the same as, or even worse than, those they experienced before they were imprisoned, and who then re-offend.

What a significant number of the people we send to prison need is not a new prison campus but rather a comprehensive range of services to address the factors that lead them to commit crime.

Promoters of the development of Thornton Hall often euphemistically refer to it as a 'prison campus'. However, the prospect of imprisoning on one site, some distance outside Dublin, 1,400 men, women and children, many of whom will be the among the most vulnerable in our society, might be equally referred to as a 'penal colony'.

Plans for this prison are, it seems, well advanced, yet apparently there is to be a period of public consultation about the proposed development in the near future. If that consultation is to be anything other than window-dressing, then it must allow for the possibility of serious reconsideration of at least the most alarming aspects of the proposed development. These include the expansion in the number of prison places, which will perpetuate the use of imprisonment for petty offenders; the proposals relating to the women's prison, and the inclusion in the complex of a facility for young people who are under eighteen.

Notes

1. The average cost of keeping a person in prison in 2005 was €90,900. (Irish Prison Service, *Annual Report 2005*, Dublin: Irish Prison Service, 2006, p. 68.)
2. The new prison complex at Thornton Hall will be almost as large as Long Kesh.
3. The Minister for Justice was speaking in Dublin on 25 July 2007 at the launch of *The Whitaker Report 20 Years On – Lessons Learned or Lessons Forgotten?*, published by The Katherine Howard Foundation.
4. Limitations of space prevent examination of several other important concerns regarding the proposals for Thornton Hall, in particular the plan to move the Central Mental Hospital to the new site, and the use of a Public Private Partnership to build and maintain the prison.
5. Fitzpatrick Associates, Economic Consultants, *Irish Prison Service Capital Expenditure Review*, Dublin: Irish Prison Service, 2006, p. 12. This report was commissioned by the Irish Prison Service and is available on www.justice.ie
6. Irish Prison Service, *Annual Report 2005*, p. 13.
7. *Dáil Debates*, 6 November 2007 (Vol. 640, No. 6).
8. Irish Prison Service, *Annual Report 2005*, p. 11.
9. *Ibid*., p. 12.
10. *Dáil Debates*, 6 November 2007 (Vol. 640, No. 6).
11. *Study of Offender Recidivism in Ireland*. This three-year project involved collaboration between criminologists at University College Dublin, the University of Missouri-St Louis and Cambridge University. Findings of the research will be published in a number of forthcoming journal articles. However, details of the research findings were, with the researchers' permission, widely reported in the Irish media in December 2006: see, for example, *The Irish Times*, 6 December 2006.
12. Council of Europe, *Report to the Government of Ireland on the Visit to Ireland carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 2 to 13 October 2006*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 10 October 2007, CPT Inf (2007) 40, par. 38, p. 21.
13. *Sunday Business Post*, 20 May 2007.
14. Christia Quinlan, 'The Women We Imprison', *Irish Criminal Law Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2003. For another detailed study on the profile of women in prison see: Celesta McCann James, 'Recycled Women: Oppression and the Social World of Women Prisoners in the Irish Republic,' Thesis (Ph.D.), National University of Ireland, Galway, September 2001.
15. *The Irish Times*, 13 August 2007.
16. Expert Group on Children Detention Schools, *First Progress Report* to Mr Brian Lenihan TD, Minister for Children, December 2006, Dublin: Irish Youth Justice Service and Office of Minister for Children, 2006, p. 4.
17. *Dáil Debates*, 9 October 2007 (Vol. 639, No. 1).

Tony O'Riordan SJ is Director of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice

How Much Equality is Needed for Justice?

Gerry O'Hanlon SJ

Introduction

Critics of Ireland's decade-long economic boom often, with an eye to justice, express considerable concern about 'rising inequality and about the core features of the strategy adopted by the Government to combat poverty'.[1] This is so despite the fact that since 1994 the percentage of the population living in 'consistent poverty' appears to have fallen from 16 per cent to 7 per cent.[2] However, since the late 1990s, 'relative income poverty' has persistently remained around 20 per cent, higher than it was in 1994.[3] Would it be more just to return to a poorer but more equal Ireland, or is this the wrong kind of question to ask? Can we say instead that this is not a choice Ireland needs to make?[4]

While we have systems in place to measure 'consistent' and 'relative' income poverty on a regular basis, we have no systems that routinely measure relative poverty in terms of access to health, housing, education, social supports and transport.[5] If, over the next decade, the Government moved to address the issue of inadequate public services and social supports, would this satisfy critics, even if considerable relative disparities in income and wealth remained? Or do we also need to address more directly these relative disparities, by means, for example, of greater tax equity?

And what if one goes beyond Ireland and considers the issues of equality and justice in the world at large – how are they and ought they to be linked?

Contrasting Perspectives

In a provocative piece from an avowedly Christian perspective, Mary Kenny argues that equality – except in respect of the unique value of every human person – is not Christian doctrine but rather a notion ushered in by the French and Russian Revolutions.[6] In fact, she argues, parables such as the Prodigal Son, the labourers in the vineyard, the unequal distribution of talents, all show that life is not fair, and what matters is not equality but the way you use what you have been given. And so, she asserts, what Christianity teaches is kind and loving behaviour towards everyone, as well as issuing a warning to rich people not to be greedy, cruel and arrogant, since it is true that riches often lead people astray. So, concludes Kenny, at a secular level equality theory sets people up for a life-time's unhappiness: 'if you are always comparing yourself to others on the grounds of a lack of equality, you will certainly be miserable', while in the scale of Christian values the doctrine of equality is 'historically heretical'. Is she right?

In a very different analysis, John Baker argues for the intrinsic connection between equality and poverty (and by implication justice).[7] His definition of equality is wide-ranging: it includes the egalitarian (if not strictly equal) distribution of resources, equality of opportunity, equal respect and recognition, equality in power relations and equality in relations of care, love and solidarity. Does Christianity, *pace* Kenny, entail something like this strong definition of equality?

Catholic Social Teaching on Equality

Human Dignity and Equality

Fundamental to Catholic social teaching is the assertion of the basic dignity and equality of all human beings. This basic equality – also asserted in secular human rights discourse, even if more as a self-evident truth than one which can be proved – is said in Catholic social teaching to be grounded in two revealed truths of the Christian faith: the creation of humankind in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1: 26) and the taking on of human flesh and nature by God in the human being that is Jesus Christ. Every human person is gifted into birth by God, is called to be a sister or brother of Jesus Christ and to become part of the rich love-life of God's own self.

For Christians, this deep earthing of human dignity in the ultimate reality that is God explains and justifies secular human rights discourse, not to mention that instinctive grasp of humankind's misery and grandeur which characterises literature, philosophy, and the human sciences down through the ages. 'Sceptre and Crown must tumble down…': in the end, beggar or king, the

wonder and mystery that at our best we instinctively grasp in every human being entails a basic equality that is due to our identity as beings who are from and for God.

A Framework of Principles

Given this basic equality, Catholic social teaching develops a framework of principles and values which it believes can help to structure our lives together.

We ought to live according to the principle of **the common good**, a principle which, in contrast to any notion of isolated individual self-fulfilment, entails 'the sum total of social conditions which allow people either as groups or individuals to reach their fulfilment more fully and easily'.[8]

This is complemented by the principle of **the universal destination of goods**: even if there is a right to private property, still in some basic sense the goods of the earth are for all and the use of private property involves a social responsibility.[9]

Catholic social teaching involves in particular a **preferential option for the poor**: all, including those who are poor, must have access to the level of well-being necessary for their development.[10] There must be also effective conditions of equal opportunity for all and a guarantee of objective equality before the law.[11]

The principle of **solidarity** – not a 'feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people … but a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good'[12] – makes it clear that the unity and equality of humankind is marred by the existence of stark inequalities.[13]

The principle of **subsidiarity** preserves the right of consultation and decision-making at appropriate lower levels of society, avoiding the excesses of totalitarian State intervention.[14] Complemented by the values of truth, freedom and justice, the principle of subsidiarity reminds us of our role as citizens in civil society as we play our part in founding what Catholic social teaching boldly, and in almost utopian vein, calls the 'civilization of love',[15] towards which all human striving tends.

Diversity and Inequality

Given this basic framework, with its strong presumption of equality, there is room, however, for diversity and even inequality. We know that, controversially, this notion of equality in diversity (familiar to us in Ireland in the context of the politics of Northern Ireland) has been used by the Catholic Church to defend the non-ordination of women. But even if this application is contentious, the principle itself need not be: so, for example, men and women are different in many ways but are equal, and the world is the richer for having all kinds of other examples of equality in diversity (colours, sounds, physical characteristics, personality traits and so on).

Matters begin to get a bit more difficult and complicated when we come to the notion of the kind of diversity that is accompanied by inequality. In a comment on the remark of Jesus that 'You will always have the poor with you …' (Mt. 26:11) the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* notes that: 'Christian realism, while appreciating on the one hand the praiseworthy efforts being made to defeat poverty, is cautious on the other hand regarding ideological positions and Messianistic beliefs that sustain the illusion that it is possible to eliminate the problem of poverty completely from this world'.[16]

How much redistribution is needed for justice?

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These remarks do indicate that poverty is to be combated, and we may suppose that the caution expressed relates to historical experiences like the project of communism, which is criticised for its false anthropology in that basic human values, such as freedom and truth, were sacrificed in the name of a justice and equality that were not achieved. In his encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, marking the hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John Paul notes Pope Leo XIII's prescience in pointing up the dangers of 'socialism' – that 'The remedy would prove worse than the sickness…'– and in warning that encouraging 'the poor man's envy of the rich' is

not an adequate way to address the social question.[17]

More blunt is the comment of the US Catholic Bishops in their much-praised 1986 Pastoral Letter, *Economic Justice for All*:

Catholic social teaching does not require absolute equality in the distribution of income and wealth. Some degree of inequality not only is acceptable, but may also be considered desirable for economic and social reasons, such as the need for incentives and the provision of greater rewards for greater risks.[18]

Maybe Michael McDowell is closer to Catholic social teaching than we might have thought?!

Wealth Creation

There is indeed in Catholic social teaching some considerable encouragement of wealth creation in terms which are rarely cited. So, there is a defence of the right of private initiative in economic matters against those who have wanted to limit it 'in the name of an alleged "equality" of everyone in society', which has resulted 'not so much in true equality as in a "leveling down"'.[19] Business planning, innovation, risk taking, wealth creation, entrepreneurial ability are all praised.[20] The Church recognises the 'proper role of profit as the first indicator that a business is functioning well'.[21] There is reference to an 'authentic concept' of business competition.[22] The free market is praised as in many circumstances being 'the most efficient instrument for utilising resources and effectively responding to needs … a truly competitive market is an effective instrument for attaining importance objectives of justice'.[23] All this needs to take place in the context of environmentally sustainable development.[24]

This approval of wealth creation, this utilisation of talents which are unequally distributed, must, according to Catholic social teaching, occur within a context which respects that basic framework of principles and values outlined above. And so the US Bishops, after their remarks on the admissibility of some inequality, go on to say:

However, unequal distribution should be evaluated in terms of several moral principles we have enunciated: the priority of meeting the basic needs of the poor and the importance of increasing the level of participation by all members of society in the economic life of the nation. These norms establish a strong presumption against extreme inequality of income and wealth as long as there are poor, hungry and homeless people in our midst. They also suggest that extreme inequalities are detrimental to the development of social solidarity and community.[25]

Love and Justice

Again and again, faithful to principles such as the common good and solidarity, Catholic social teaching condemns stark and extreme inequalities whether they exist within or between nations. Even if there are different talents, still each person and each nation has a right 'to be seated at the table of the common banquet' instead of lying outside the door like Lazarus, while 'the dogs come and lick his sores'.[26]

And so, if wealth itself is not condemned, but rather 'immoderate love of riches or their selfish use',[27] there is an obligation on the rich to act always with love for the poor, a love that involves not just almsgiving but also the social and political aspects of poverty as well as the demands of justice.[28] This will even mean that the rich, the more fortunate, 'should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others'.[29] There is also a warning that an excessive affirmation of equality of rights 'can give rise to an individualism in which each one claims his own rights without wishing to be answerable for the common good'.[30]

Again and again ... Catholic social teaching condemns stark and extreme inequalities whether they exist within or between nations.

There are several reasons given why serious disparities, inequalities, imbalances of any kind (economic, social, political, cultural, and religious) are to be avoided. When they involve the denial of basic human needs and rights, such inequalities are an offence to the basic dignity of oppressed people. When they involve an excessive gap between different sections of society or between different countries, there arises a lack of social solidarity and real community, with dangerous consequences for all (not least, by

implication, the threat of violence).[31]

In more positive terms, social solidarity will bring benefit to the richer nations, both within their own countries and in their dealings with the rest of the world. Without it, they live 'in a sort of existential confusion … even though surrounded by an abundance of material possessions … a sense of alienation and loss of their own humanity has made people feel reduced to the role of cogs in the machinery of production and consumption'.[32]

Something of this sense of alienation can surely be observed in contemporary Ireland, as we struggle to find meaning in so much affluence, when around and about us, in Ireland and more visibly in other parts of the world, so many are clearly not 'seated at the table of the common banquet'.

Implications

It seems to me that a prophetic but also a wise perspective issues from Catholic social teaching on equality. The fundamental equality of all ought to result in ways of living together that ensure basic human needs are met and that relative inequalities are not so excessive as to wound solidarity and be a blight on human dignity and respect.

There is no precise measurement given in Catholic social teaching as to what might constitute excessive inequality, but plentiful indicators are provided to help in the discernment of particular situations.[33] Envy at the existence of a certain degree of inequality is not a sufficient indicator that there exists injustice.

Throughout an exploration of Catholic social teaching on equality, one is conscious that this is no mere abstract, academic exercise but involves real people often living in intolerable situations: there is real urgency about getting the analysis right.

Certain implications flow from the preceding discussion of Catholic social teaching. Clearly, there do exist stark and even death-dealing inequalities in our world, and in prophetic mode we need academics and activists of all kinds to engage with this evil. At the same time, there is a cautionary or wise undertow to the prophecy: a utopian advocacy of what is not achievable can result in a leveling down that is worse than what went before.[34]

In this sense, I would suggest that the Christian values of altruism, preferential option for the poor, solidarity and *kenosis* (self-emptying) are not sufficient criteria on their own for sound social and economic policies: within the notion of the common good, there must exist too a healthy respect for self-interest, wealth creation, profit, entrepreneurial risk-taking, as well as an ethic of consumption.[35]

When applied to Ireland this suggests an interesting scenario. It is certainly the case that poverty still needs to be tackled, that inequality (particularly when compared to levels in some other wealthy EU countries) is excessive, that one way to address this situation is to realise the so-called social dividend accruing from this time of affluence. And in this context there is always the imperative for poverty and justice lobbies to denounce injustices and skewed ways of proceeding: the default position of governments and indeed societies very often is to favour the well-off.

Constructive Dialogue

Perhaps it is also important for those of us who are inspired by Catholic social teaching to engage more constructively with the wealthy and powerful, some of whom may very well be susceptible to what Christian teaching has to say about the conduct of business, social affairs and politics.

Do we too easily fall into an exclusively oppositional mode of discourse? There is a discernment of spirits needed here: how to be true to the gospel condemnation of the danger of riches without falling into that begrudgery which is often the Irish form of envy?[36]

The preferential option for the poor cannot be discharged responsibly by prophetic condemnation only: it requires engagement with the powerful to come up with good solutions for all. The rich and powerful need to be persuaded and wooed as well as condemned; they need to be engaged with on their own turf, with respect for the issues they face: this, it seems to me, is what Catholic social teaching on equality suggests and it is what we in the church often fail to do. Constructive engagement of this kind is needed to translate values, however admirable, into workable policies.

With regard to the wider world and its scandalous inequalities, we in Ireland do well with respect to aid and issues around debt relief, but seem less

aware that our trade policies are an intrinsic part of this picture. We need to move to a situation for ourselves and others in the western world where such policies are less protectionist and self-serving and more just to developing nations. And in an increasingly globalised world we need to actively seek to establish the kind of international institutions that can effectively deal with the challenges of a more equal model of globalisation at all the requisite levels – economic, political, cultural, social and religious.[37]

Conclusion

It is interesting, given the Church's negative experience of the French Revolution in particular, that equality is endorsed so strongly. That negative experience is perhaps reflected in the careful situating of equality in the context of other values and the dislike of terms such as 'class struggle', even if, of course, there are other, more positive reasons for such a nuanced approach.

I wonder, even if he had cared enough to bother about Lazarus at all (Lk 16: 19–31), would it ever have been possible for Dives to literally sit down with him at 'the table of the common banquet'? Perhaps too much divided them at all kinds of levels; perhaps this would not have been what Lazarus himself wanted? Dives is condemned because he did nothing – a sin of omission, perhaps a rationalisation on his part that, given all the complications, there was nothing that he could do to make the situation better.

We are urged not to fall into the same trap of self-serving rationalisation. No human being ought to be deprived of basic human rights, and the gap between the better-off and the less well-off ought to be such that, at least metaphorically, we are open to sitting at the same table. This end-point is more likely to be attained by an evidence-based approach than an ideological one, be that ideology a discredited socialism or the predominant and dysfunctional neo-liberalism. It is an end-point worth giving one's life to, not so much to avoid condemnation, but rather to honour the wonderful gift to us all, rich and poor, of being created in the image and likeness of God, called to be a sister or brother of Jesus Christ.

Notes

1. 'Poverty and Inequality', *Working Notes*, Issue 55, May 2007, p. 5.
2. Central Statistics Office, *EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) 2005*, Dublin: Central Statistics Office, 2006; 'Poverty and Inequality', *Working Notes,* Issue 55, May 2007, p. 7.

   'Consistent poverty' is defined as falling below an income poverty line (set at 60 per cent of median equivalised income) *and* lacking two or more items from an index of deprivation. (These items include being able to keep one's home adequately warm, being able to afford two pairs of strong shoes, having enough money to buy presents for family members at least once a year.)
3. *Ibid*. 'Relative poverty' is defined as having an income that is lower than 60 per cent of median equivalised income.
4. 'Poverty and Inequality', *Working Notes*, Issue 55, May 2007, p. 7.
5. 'Voting in Pursuit of Justice', *Working Notes*, Issue 55, May 2007, p. 3.
6. Mary Kenny, *The Irish Catholic*, 19 April 2007, p. 15.
7. John Baker, 'Poverty and Equality: Ten Reasons why Anyone who Wants to Combat Poverty Should Embrace Equality as Well', in Combat Poverty Agency and Equality Authority, *Poverty and Inequality: Applying an Equality Dimension to Poverty Proofing*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency and Equality Authority, 2003, pp. 12–25.
8. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Dublin: Veritas, 2005, n. 164.
9. *Ibid*., nn. 171–81.
10. *Ibid*., n. 172; n.182.
11. *Ibid*., n. 145.
12. Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (The Social Concern of the Church), Encyclical Letter, 30 December 1987, n. 38.
13. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 192.
14. *Ibid*., nn. 185–88.
15. *Ibid*., nn. 575–83.
16. *Ibid*., n. 183.
17. Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (The Hundredth Anniversary), Encyclical Letter, 1 May 1991, n. 12, in David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, New York: Orbis Books, 2005.
18. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, Washington DC: Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, United States Catholic Conference, 1986, n. 185.
19. Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (The Social Concern of the Church), Encyclical Letter, 30 December 1987, n. 15, in O'Brien and Shannon, *op.cit*.
20. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nn. 336–37.
21. *Ibid*., n. 340.
22. *Ibid*., n. 343.
23. *Ibid*., n. 347.
24. *Ibid*., nn. 461–87.
25. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *op. cit*., n. 185.
26. Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (The Social Concern of the Church), n. 33 in O'Brien

and Shannon, *op.cit*.

27. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 184.
28. *Ibid*., n. 184.
29. *Ibid*., n. 158.
30. *Ibid*., n. 158.
31. *Ibid*., n. 192.
32. *Ibid*., n. 374.
33. I could find only one explicit reference in Catholic social teaching to the notion of 'relative poverty' – cf *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, op. cit*., n. 362.
34. See also Seamus Murphy, SJ, 'Utopianism, Advocacy and Consequentialism', *Milltown Studies*, No. 28, Autumn 1991, pp. 5–23.
35. In a 1999 Pastoral Letter, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference argued that there is an urgent need to develop 'an ethic of consumption'. (*Prosperity with a Purpose*, Dublin: Veritas, 1999, pp. 139–144) The Pastoral Letter acknowledges that this is 'probably the least developed area of the Church's social teaching …' (p. 139). See also Padraig Corkery, *Companion to the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Dublin: Veritas, 2007, Chapter Eight.
36. Andrew Greeley, 'Will Success Spoil Cathleen Ní Houlihan?', *Doctrine and Life*, Vol. 57, No. 8, October 2007, pp. 46–52.
37. 'The architecture of global governance has massive gaps in its coverage', John Palmer, 'European Integration: A Vital Step on the Road to a New World Order', in Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, *The Future of Europe: Uniting Vision, Values and Citizens?*, Dublin: Veritas, 2006, p. 136; also *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 369; n. 371; n. 441.

Gerry O'Hanlon SJ is a theologian and a staff member of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice

Homes not Hostels: Rethinking Homeless Policy

Peter McVerry SJ and Eoin Carroll

Introduction

Most homeless people simply want a place they can call home. Some need varying levels of support to enable them to keep a home. But a key to their own front door is the symbol of the desires of homeless people.

Our failure to provide suitable, permanent accommodation for homeless people has necessitated the development of a complex labyrinth of services to cater for the needs of people, some of whom remain homeless, year after year, becoming increasingly damaged and frustrated. The consequence is that it becomes more and more difficult to meet their needs – which then leads to a further expansion and specialisation of homeless services.

This article is not a criticism of these services (some of which are provided by one of the authors!) or of the commitment and professionalism of most of the staff in the services, but it is a criticism of the lack of political will to provide suitable, permanent accommodation for those who are poor, including those who are homeless. The article also challenges the conventional wisdom that this multiplicity of homeless services is necessary.

Simon Brooke, in an excellent review of staffing in homeless services (published in 2005),[1] identified 57 organisations which were employing 800 staff in 140 projects to meet the needs of 2,500 homeless people nationally. However, it should be noted that the study looked only at homeless people accommodated in mainstream services, therefore excluding rough sleepers, B&B accommodation, and other inappropriate forms of accommodation. If responses to this wider group (estimated to be at least another 2,500[2]) are included, the range of services is even greater.

The total statutory budget for homeless services, provided by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the health authorities in 2005 was €81.2 million (excluding capital costs).[3]

Homeless Services in Dublin

It is in Dublin that homeless services have been most developed, under the watchful eye of the Homeless Agency. The Homeless Agency was established to take responsibility for the management and coordination of services for people who are homeless in the Dublin area. It has very successfully developed services to fill gaps which existed, raised standards in the services it funds, and ensured better coordination between services, both statutory and voluntary. In short, homeless people in Dublin today get a better quality of service than ever before, thanks largely to the existence and commitment of the Homeless Agency.

There are about 2,000 homeless people in Dublin.[4] To meet their needs, there is an array of forums and consultative committees, as well as various statutory and non-statutory projects and support programmes. These include:

- **The Board of the Homeless Agency**, consisting of about fourteen persons drawn from a wide variety of agencies. This Board meets six times a year. (The Board proposes plans to the Cross Departmental Team, Local Authority Strategic Policy Committees and Councils, the Health Service Executive and other statutory agencies.)

- **A Consultative Forum**, consisting of twenty-seven persons, drawn from a wide variety of agencies. This Forum meets four times a year. Its role is to advise the Homeless Agency, monitor its action plans and develop partnership between organisations and sectors.

- **Eight 'Local Forums'** (five in the Dublin City Council area, and three in Fingal, Dun Laoghaire–Rathdown and South County Dublin), again with some twenty people each, who meet regularly to consider issues and services relating to homelessness at a local level.

- **Several Neighbourhood Forums**, such as Ballymun Homeless Network, which meet regularly and which feed into the Local Forums.

- **Nine networks**, co-ordinated by the Homeless Agency, to identify issues in relation to specific areas of homelessness.

- **Six working groups**, commissioned by the Homeless Agency to address particular issues in relation to homelessness.

- **The Homeless Network**, an umbrella group of about twenty-one voluntary organisations working with homeless people, which feeds into the Consultative Forum.

- **Sixty projects**, employing about 700 people, including volunteers.

In addition, national level structures include:

- **A Cross Departmental Team on Homelessness**, consisting of ten representatives from various government departments and statutory organisations. The team reports directly to the **Cabinet Sub Committee on Social Inclusion**. The Homeless Agency also makes six-monthly reports to the Sub Committee.

- **A National Homeless Consultative Committee (NHCC)**, consisting of twelve representatives from government departments, statutory and voluntary sector organisations. Established in April 2007, the purpose of the NHCC is to facilitate homeless service providers in making an input into the next government homeless strategy.

The statutory budget for homeless services in Dublin amounts to **approximately €54 million per annum**.[5]

This sum is the equivalent of spending €74 per homeless person per day over the course of a year. In comparison, the daily mortgage repayment for a first-time buyer (assuming an average house price of €270,000[6]) would be €46.22.[7]

Most voluntary organisations in the sector also engage in significant levels of fund-raising to meet their needs, adding perhaps a further €10 million to the budget for homeless services.

Yet, despite all this colossal activity and substantial expenditure, many homeless people remain homeless, year after year.

Is there an alternative?

Permanent Housing with Support

The core shortcoming of present homeless services is encapsulated in the statement: 'When someone is "accommodated" be it in emergency, B&B or transitional accommodation, they are still homeless.'[8] Our response to homelessness cannot be compartmentalised into some distinct set of policy measures, separate from housing policy generally. Instead, homelessness policy needs to be integrated into overall housing policy and housing for homeless people needs to be incorporated into mainstream housing provision. Rather than focusing on the complexities of homelessness, we need first and foremost to recognise that: 'the primary need to someone who is homeless is housing'[9] and to acknowledge that the provision of housing should be the central focus of homeless policy.

Homeless people dream of a key to their own front door
© D. Speirs

A shift away from the provision of hostel and other dedicated types of accommodation for homeless people to permanent 'normal' accommodation, in the community, with suitable supports, is gaining favour in some other countries.

If such a shift in policy were to occur in this country, it would eliminate the need for many of the projects currently serving homeless people. Resources could then be concentrated on deploying a skilled and professional group of people who would provide a range of supports to assist (formerly homeless) people with their social and life issues.

The Midlands Simon Community Regional Settlement Service is a positive example of where the primary focus is the provision of appropriate

long-term accommodation.[10] The Settlement Service has taken an inter-agency approach by creating a partnership with the Health Service Executive, local authorities, other statutory agencies, homeless fora and voluntary agencies. The Service aims to support a move out of homelessness by:

- Assisting people to secure suitable accommodation;
- Supporting people to move into their new home;
- Providing support to people to enable them to maintain their new home.

Within the first year of the Community Regional Settlement Service, over half (thirty-seven) of its referrals resulted in service users being provided with appropriate, and in most instances long-term, accommodation.[11]

Obstacles to a Shift in Policy

Lack of Social Housing

Of the several obstacles to a shift in policy, the foremost is the dire shortage of suitable mainstream accommodation. Report after report on homeless services identifies the *failure to provide appropriate long-term accommodation* as the primary factor that keeps people homeless and prevents any significant progress in reducing homelessness. During the past twelve years of unprecedented economic growth and surplus government revenues, the neglect of the Government to invest in an adequate expansion of social housing has been one of its most inexcusable failures.

In the eleven years from 1996 to 2006 an average of 5,357[12] social housing units were provided each year. However, when the sale of social housing units (yearly average of 1,837)[13], and the demolition of others, is taken into account, only around 3,400 net social housing units per year were provided.

The lack of foresight and commitment in relation to investing in public housing has resulted in a colossal need for social housing. In recognition of this, the December 2004 National Economic and Social Council (NESC) report on housing recommended that 73,000 new social housing units should be provided in the eight-year period 2005–2012, a yearly average of 9,000.[14] (Achieving this figure would require a gross increase of at least 10,850 new social houses, in order to allow for continued sales and demolitions of local authority houses.) In the two years following the NESC report, social housing provision was much lower than the recommended 9,000 net new units: in 2005, 6,477 units of social housing were built or purchased; in 2006, the figure was 6,361. Since, however, as sales of local authority housing were 1,738 in 2005 and 1,855 in 2006,[15] the net increase was much lower.

During the past twelve years ... the neglect of the Government to invest in an adequate expansion of social housing has been one of its most inexcusable failures.

The actual commitment made by Government in relation to social housing provision is, in fact, to a significantly lower level of output than that recommended by NESC. The *National Development Plan*, published in January 2007, envisages the building of 8,600 gross new social housing units each year over the next seven years (amounting to an estimated 7,400 *net* new social housing units each year over that period).[16] This is 2,000 (18 per cent) fewer houses per year than was recommended by NESC. Yet it is significantly more than has been achieved over the last seven years. It remains to be seen whether this target will actually be met, given how previous projections for increased provision remained unrealised and given also the fact that only 3,167 units of social housing were completed in the first six months of 2007.[17]

The failure to invest in social housing has left local authorities with competing demands for an inadequate supply of social housing from a range of groups all of whom have pressing housing needs. The most recent data show that in 2005 there were 43,700 households nationally waiting for social housing.[18] On the waiting lists, the needs of homeless people (75 per cent of whom are single) vie with those of families living in hopelessly inappropriate or overcrowded accommodation. Dublin City Council, to its credit, allocates one-third of its lettings to homeless people. But most local authorities leave homeless people at the bottom of their housing waiting lists for years on end.

Reliance on the Private Rented Sector

Government policy is still focusing on providing 'accommodation solutions' through the private sector rather than making a firm commitment to increasing the stock of social housing. The Rent Supplement Scheme – originally devised as a short-term income maintenance scheme to assist households experiencing temporary difficulties in paying their rent, as a result of, for example, the loss of a job – now provides accommodation support for 53,000 households, accounting for one third of all households receiving state housing assistance.[19] The majority (in excess of 70 per cent) of Rent Supplement recipients have long-term housing needs, and may or may not be on the housing waiting list.

Even as a short-term solution to housing need, the Rent Supplement Scheme is failing in significant ways – for example, a considerable proportion of landlords will not accept tenants who are on Rent Supplement and the level of payment has not been indexed to keep pace with the general increase in rents.[20]

In a supposed cost-saving exercise – and also to improve standards and provide increased security to tenants in the private rented sector – the Government has developed the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). Through RAS, a local authority can lease accommodation with private landlords and then sub-let it to persons in need of housing. The property is then classified as being part of public housing provision! A contractual agreement between the local authority and private landlord lasts between four and twenty years. It is envisaged that 30,000 households will move from Rent Supplement to the Rental Accommodation Scheme. It needs to be asked: Is this cost effective in the long term or would it be more efficient to invest in direct public provision of housing? The Comptroller and Auditor General's report, *Rent Supplements*, declares:

'This [decision] is analogous to the choice households with sufficient income may make in choosing to rent or buy'[21]

The choice, we suggest, that nearly all households would make would be to *buy*. This example of the Government's apparently ferocious appetite for private sector solutions to public policy needs was introduced without any prior comprehensive economic and social analysis. The Comptroller and Auditor's report states that while the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government 'has carried out some analysis of the relative cost of renting and investing in social housing' no specific targets have been set in relation to the savings to be achieved and that 'there is no easy way to determine which is more cost efficient'.[22]

Community Attitudes

A further obstacle to a major shift in overall homeless policy is the attitude of communities. Experience shows that there will be resistance from local communities to proposals to accommodate homeless people in their midst. The resistance will be even greater in the case of proposals regarding those homeless people who have personal issues such as addictions, mental health problems, personality disorders or behaviour problems, even if such people are receiving intensive support with these issues.

People remain homeless year after year *© JCFJ*

Indeed, this latter group, a minority of homeless people, are more likely to be evicted from local authority accommodation than offered it! And there are not too many private landlords who will be enthusiastic about providing them with rented accommodation. However, evidence from other countries shows that this difficult group, *with suitable, sometimes intensive, support*, can be sustained in their own accommodation without creating problems for their neighbours.

There is the additional obstacle of the reluctance of many local authorities to stand firm in the face of opposition from the community to the allocation of tenancies to homeless people. This reluctance can be rationalised by saying that homeless people with issues such as addiction, mental health or behaviour problems are not suitable for 'normal' housing and must address their problems before they can be considered for

such. They therefore require temporary housing in order to allow them time for stabilisation. This policy ensures that they remain on the margins of society. It fails to recognise that the vast majority of the 15,000 heroin users, for example, are, in fact, living in 'normal' accommodation, with family or friends, and can maintain that accommodation with their support and the support of their doctor, clinic or counsellor. Similarly, the vast majority of people with mental health problems are living in 'normal' accommodation with support from family, friends and professional medical services. Furthermore, it fails to recognise that it is extremely difficult for homeless people to address their problems if they remain consigned to the margins and have no safe and secure place in which to live – indeed, in these circumstances, their problems are only likely to get worse.

Innovative Approaches

This article proposes a shift away from meeting the needs of homeless people in 'supported housing', of varying types, to meeting their needs in 'housing with support'. Instead of their housing being temporary and their supports being more or less permanent, their housing would be permanent and their supports could be more or less temporary, depending on their needs.

In this regard, Ireland has much to learn from developments in other countries. In his report, Simon Brooke refers to the 'Pathways to Housing' project in New York City: this moves homeless people with addictions and psychiatric disabilities directly from the streets into permanent housing.[23] Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams then deliver services to these formerly homeless people, in their own homes. Research has shown that this approach is more successful in getting homeless people out of homelessness, and keeping them out of homelessness, than conventional services, of the type we typically use in Ireland.

Another example is the transformation in the use of the Prince George, once the most fashionable hotel in Manhattan, New York. When it closed, it fell into disrepair. It was totally renovated, back to its former glory, in 1999, and re-opened to provide accommodation for 416 people, half of them formerly homeless, and half of them working, but on low incomes that would make it difficult for them to pay for suitable accommodation. All rooms are self-contained and en-suite. Tenants pay a differential rent, related to their income. On the ground floor of the hotel is a range of services, such as addiction services, mental health services and welfare and advice services, which are open, Monday to Saturday, to all tenants. Also available are workshops on, for example, money management, nutritional cooking, yoga and painting; a monthly dentistry service arrives in a dentist van. The hotel has a state-of-the-art security system and a 24-hour laundry. It has a 95 per cent success rate. The running costs of the project are US$22 per person per night.[24]

The Need for a *Social* Housing Boom

The Homeless Agency's *Action Plan* and the current Social Partnership Agreement, *Towards 2016*, have set as goals the elimination of the need for anyone to sleep rough and the ending of long-term homelessness: these goals are to be achieved by 2010.[25] The *Action Plan* acknowledges that 'the most fundamental need of people experiencing homelessness is appropriate long-term housing'.[26] This article strongly endorses this view.

There needs to be policy shift towards the provision of good quality homes for people, with supports provided where necessary. However, assessing the evidence of political will, or the lack of it, in relation to housing policy generally, and examining social housing output over the past decade, lead to the conclusion that the goal of ending homelessness by 2010 is not going to be realised. Quite simply, that objective cannot be achieved unless there is a *social* housing boom and a significant change in policy in regard to homelessness.

Notes

1. Simon Brooke, *Work Worth Doing: A Review of Staffing in Homeless Services*, Dublin: Brunswick Press, 2005.
2. Voluntary organisations working in the sector generally agree that the number of people who are homeless is in excess of 5,000
3. Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants, *Review of the Implementation of the Government's Integrated and Preventative Homeless Strategies*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 2006, p. 6.
4. This figure is based on: Homeless Agency, *Counted In*, Dublin: Homeless Agency, 2005.
5. Homeless Agency, *Annual Report 2005: Making it Home*, Dublin: Homeless Agency, 2006.
6. Dara Deering, 'EBS/DKM Affordability Index', *Irish Property Buyer*, September 2007, p. 25.
7. This value excludes mortgage interest relief and possible tax relief. It is based on EBS mortgage calculator – 'Standard Variable' for a 35 year mortgage www.ebs.ie, October 2007.
8. Simon Communities of Ireland, *Taking the Integrated Strategy Forward*, Conference Papers,

National Conference, 21 February 2004, p. 4.

9. *Ibid*.
10. This is just one example of the growing number of settlement services.
11. Joan O'Flynn, *Providing Solutions to Homelessness: Inter-Agency Partnership in Action*, Athlone: Midlands Simon Community, 2007.
12. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, *Annual Housing Statistics Bulletin*, Years 2000 to 2006, Dublin: Stationery Office.
13. *Ibid*.
14. National Economic and Social Council, *Housing in Ireland: Performance and Policy*, Dublin: National Economic and Social Council, 2004 (Report No. 112), p. 152.
15. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, *Annual Housing Statistics Bulletin 2006*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 2007.
16. Government of Ireland, *Transforming Ireland: A Better Quality of Life for All, National Development Plan 2007–2013*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 2007.
17. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, *Quarterly Housing Statistics: Quarter 2 2007*, 26 September 2007.
18. There are probably many more households whose housing needs would allow them to qualify for inclusion on the waiting lists but who for one reason or another have not applied.
19. Comptroller and Auditor General, *Report on Value for Money Examination, Department of Social and Family Affairs: Rent Supplements*, Dublin, 2006.
20. Clients of the housing organisation Threshold have experienced rent inflation of up to 20 per cent this year. John Downes, '"Working Poor" Increasingly in Arrears', *The Irish Times*, 23 October 2007.
21. Comptroller and Auditor General, *op. cit*., p. 58.
22. *Ibid*.
23. Simon Brooke, *op. cit*., p. 56.
24. David Chater, 'An Elegant Solution', *The Guardian*, 14 December 2005.
25. Homeless Agency, *A Key to the Door: Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin 2007–2010*, Dublin, Homeless Agency, 2007; *Towards 2016: Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006–2015*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
26. Homeless Agency, *A Key to the Door: Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin 2007–2010*, *op. cit*., p. 5.

Peter McVerry SJ is a member of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice team and an Executive Director of the Peter McVerry Trust, which provides accommodation and care for homeless young people

Eoin Carroll is Advocacy and Social Policy Research Officer with the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice

What is Development? Promoting the Good of Every Person and of the Whole Person

Peter Henriot SJ

The year 2007 marked the fortieth anniversary of the publication *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples), Pope Paul VI's encyclical, and the twentieth anniversary of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (The Social Concern of the Church), the encyclical issued by Pope John Paul II.[1] In my view, commemoration of documents written many years ago is worthwhile only if it contributes to understanding of the present and offers hope for the future. Such commemoration should move us to that 'action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world' which is central to the sharing of the Good News of Jesus Christ.[2]

My own appreciation of the messages of *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, and of the rich treasury of social wisdom which we call the church's social teaching, has been profoundly shaped by my living for a year (in the mid-1970s) in Latin America, in Medellin, Colombia, and my life and work in Africa for almost all of the past twenty years. Zambia, where I live, is one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of natural resources, but one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of people's well-being. That sad paradox – wealth amidst poverty – spurs on my political and economic work in our Jesuit social centre in Lusaka and my priestly and pastoral work in a young and very vibrant church.

Understanding of Development

What I consider to be the biggest challenge in Zambia and in Africa, in Peru and in Latin America, can be expressed very simply in the question: What is our understanding of 'development'? I sincerely believe that *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* are immensely helpful to us who struggle with that question. The clear emphasis of *Populorum Progressio*, later reiterated in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, is that authentic development is: 'for each and for all, the transition from less human conditions to those which are more human'(n. 20).

Paul VI expressed the aspirations of women and men, especially those living in misery, as being: 'to seek to do more, know more and have more in order *to be more*' (n. 6). For *Populorum Progressio*, development is much more than economic growth: 'In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person.' (n. 14)

In praising *Populorum Progressio* twenty years later, John Paul II highlighted in particular this definition and orientation of development as part of what he called the 'originality of the message' of the encyclical. John Paul pushed further the discussion of 'having and being' by emphasising:

To 'have' objects and goods does not in itself perfect the human subject, unless it contributes to the maturing and enrichment of that subject's 'being', that is to say unless it contributes to the realization of the human vocation as such. (n. 28)

According to the message of Catholic social teaching, then, the question to ask in relation to any development planning, implementation, or evaluation, is: 'What is happening to the *people*?' – not, 'What is happening to the *economy*?'

It is of significance that the understanding of development found in *Populorum Progressio* and in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* was expressed years before the recognition and popularisation of important new definitions of development found in, for example, the *Human Development Index* in the annual reports of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (beginning in 1990) and the 'human capabilities' measurement devised by Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize Laureate, in his monumental study, *Development as Freedom*.[3]

Both the UNDP's *Index* and Sen's 'capabilities' measurement challenged the fundamental grounds upon which distinctions were made between 'developed', 'developing', and 'underdeveloped' nations. For the orthodox view of development – still strongly influential among international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and in ministries of finance and development in many nations – is based primarily on an economic focus on growth in gross domestic product (GDP), the

monetary measurement of the total of goods produced and services rendered. But both the UNDP and Sen have placed an emphasis upon what was happening to the human person, and that, of course, is precisely the focus of *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

The question to ask in relation to any development planning, implementation, or evaluation, is: 'What is happening to the people? – not, 'What is happening to the economy?'

Experiences of Latin America

As we look back over the years, I believe that for both Latin America and Africa this challenge to the orthodox view of development has been necessary and vitally important. Two historical challenges, one in Latin America, the other in Africa, merit particular attention.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy inaugurated the ambitious 'Alliance for Progress' programme. Though aimed certainly at addressing problems of poverty on the southern continent of the Americas, the Alliance for Progress was heavily imbued with the heady 'developmentalism' of promoting economic growth.

Under the influence of Walter Rostow's book, *The Stages of Economic Growth*,[4] development was seen primarily as a planned effort to enable a 'developing' country to 'take off' by increasing economic growth, which – it was hoped – would 'trickle down' to the masses. (I recall the all-too-true observation of one of the Brazilian military dictators in the 1960s who remarked that Brazil had indeed taken off but had left the Brazilians behind! For while the economy had produced high GDP growth rates, the people had been left behind with low social improvement rates.)

The Alliance for Progress and similar development programmes promoted by the United States of America and many European countries were firmly based on this view of development. Hence the strong attack – verbal as well as political and even military – against any alternative political and economic approaches to development.

We need to reflect on whether there is still some of the 'take off' theory guiding the economic plans of developing countries. Do we not need to hear again and again the human-centred definition of what true development is all about? And can a renewed interest in the lessons of *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* help in the current reality?

Experiences of Africa

In Africa, the post-colonial period may have meant the semblance of a passage of political power from European countries to the newly-independent African states. But this did not mean a ready passage of economic power. Thus, in *Populorum Progressio* Paul VI was able to identify the danger of what he called a 'neo-colonialism, in the form of political pressures and economic suzerainty aimed at maintaining or acquiring complete dominance'(n. 52).

Zambia, like so many African states, opted after independence for a command economy with heavy state ownership and control of the economy. Socialism was the dominant ideology. But Zambia was hit hard in the 1970s by massive trade deficits caused by a collapse in the price of its main export, copper, and an increase in the price of its main import, oil.

Moreover, the country suffered economically as a consequence of its decision not to cooperate with the apartheid regime of South Africa, with rail lines cut and infrastructure bombed.

Zambia borrowed heavily to sustain a more consumer-oriented economy and it fell deeply into debt, particularly to the multi-lateral institutions of the IMF and World Bank and the bi-lateral lenders of Europe, North America and Japan. Its path was similar to the 'debt trap' of many other poor countries: *borrow in order to service debt, and service debt at the expense of serving people*.

Faced with a stagnant economy for reasons not wholly of its own making, Zambia in the 1990s was obliged to enter into the most rapid, most rigid and most radical Structural Adjustment Programme on the continent of Africa. Massive liberalisation, privatisation and free market reforms adjusted the economy and maladjusted the

people. Large-scale retrenchment in employment, imposition of education and health fees, opening of borders to outsiders with unfair competitive advantage were all features of the Adjustment Programme.

While it is true that the economy began turning around, the majority of people did not experience the promised benefits. Life expectancy fell to its current extremely low level of 37.5 years. And HIV/AIDS, itself a development-related disease, now *infects* almost 17 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 49 but *affects* 100 per cent of the population.

Since 2000, Zambia has received cancellation of its massive debt stock of 7.2 billion US dollars as a consequence of adhering to the stringent conditions of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). But Jubilee-Zambia, the campaign hosted in Zambia by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, continues to emphasise that we must avoid falling again into debt and must chase off the so-called 'vulture funds' that would pick our scarce savings. Many other poor countries in Africa and Latin America face the same dangers. I believe the Zambian experience highlights the urgent necessity of emphasising Catholic social teaching's understanding of development in the face of economic and political structures at national and international levels which reinforce a very different view of what development means.

Zambian crops threatened by GMOs?
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Other Challenges

Among many other challenges facing our rapidly globalising world, two in particular have profound links to the human-oriented approach of *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. The first is trade.

Countries in Latin America struggle with the implications of the proposal to create a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which has been promoted especially by the United States, and we in Africa struggle with the implications of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), currently under negotiation between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Countries.[5] Both Latin America and Africa are affected by the negotiations, agreements and dispute-settlement decisions of the World Trade Organization. In all cases, the focus of concern is the same. Pope Paul VI put it simply and clearly in *Populorum Progressio*: 'Freedom of trade is fair, only if it is subject to the demands of social justice'(n. 59). This makes clear that the development component of trade arrangements, with particular concern for the poor, must be the deciding factor in signing on to the trade agreements being pushed by the rich countries of the North.

The second is the danger to the livelihoods of our peasant farmers posed by the potential introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into our agricultural sector. To-date, we in Zambia have been able to resist GMOs. How much longer we can do that in the face of immense pressure for the so-called 'Green Revolution for Africa' (backed by foundations and seed companies in the USA) is a very serious question. Many groups in Latin America are pointing up the danger of the US push for the introduction of GMOs into their countries. Again, I ask the fundamental question: 'What human development impact will this technological fix have for the people, especially the poor?'

Social and Pastoral and Personal

In my view, three clear challenges emerge from reflection on *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

Social Challenge

First, there is the social challenge of translating the wonderful insights of the Catholic social teaching of these two documents into practical political policies. By that I mean that the people-centred definition of development they offer must provide the foundation for critiques raised, approvals offered, and alternatives proposed when faced with national and international development plans.

At the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection in Lusaka we adopt a 'value-oriented' engagement with public policy, on issues such as poverty eradication, employment generation, debt contraction, trade agreements, environmental guidelines, HIV/AIDS. We undertake socio-economic analysis of these issues, then submit this to a critical evaluation arising out of the perspectives of Catholic social teaching and then recommend appropriate policy steps. This is, in effect, an application of the methodology: 'see, judge, act', or the 'pastoral circle'.

Pastoral Challenge

Second, the pastoral challenge is to continue to build a church where *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* – along with so many other important documents – perform what I refer to as the five tasks of Catholic social teaching:

Ground: underpin our social engagement with a solid foundation that instills confidence;
Inspire: fire us up to move forward even in the face of uncertainties and difficulties;
Clarify: offer a framework of fresh insights and wide vision;
Guide: provide directions and pointers toward practical actions;
Sustain: keep us moving even amidst setbacks and obstacles.

In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, John Paul II draws attention to this pastoral challenge by emphasising that: '… the Church has something to say today, just as twenty years ago, and also in the future, about the nature, conditions, requirements and aims of authentic development, and also about the obstacles which stand in its way' (n. 41). This is seen as fulfilling the mission of integral evangelisation. And Catholic social teaching is central to that evangelisation.

During the deliberations of the African Synod in 1994, a bishop from West Africa focused the assembly on the simple but profound task facing the church: 'Church of Africa', he cried, 'what must we do to be relevant and credible?' The church must indeed be both relevant to the true needs of the people and credible in the response it makes. I genuinely believe that a pastoral approach that incorporates the central messages of Catholic social teaching will indeed be relevant since it will relate well to the 'joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties' of people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way oppressed (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1).[6] And if it is a church that shares the Catholic social teaching by the way it lives – that preaches the Good News of Catholic social teaching by its clear witness – then it will indeed be credible.

Personal Challenge

Third, there is the personal challenge offered by both *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* to appreciate at a profound level the link between love and the commitment to the social justice which is essential for integral human development. I emphasise this point because I believe it is key to understanding the more radical character of Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love).[7] In *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, John Paul II is very clear in stating that: '… the process of development and liberation takes concrete shape in the exercise of solidarity, that is to say in the love and service of neighbor, especially of the poorest' (n. 46). But that love must have consequences in how we structure society, that is, in the work of justice.

In *Populorum Progressio* the meaning of that love is focused on justice when Paul VI cautions that public and private funds, gifts and loans, even if very generous, are not sufficient to eliminate hunger and reduce poverty. These efforts must be linked to action towards '… building a world where all people, no matter what their race, religion or nationality, can live fully human lives, freed from servitude imposed on them by others or by natural forces over which they have not sufficient control; a world where freedom is not an empty word …' (n. 47).

I believe that a careful reading of *Deus Caritas Est* shows that Benedict XVI is in line with this thinking of Paul VI and John Paul II. The invitation to charity is never far from the mandate for justice. For this reason I look forward to what is reported to be an up-coming social encyclical of Pope Benedict, in which I am confident he will continue to develop his critique of the structures of globalisation that deny the fullness of love.

In the personal life of each of us, then, we are challenged to put love into action – the action for the justice of integral human development.

Conclusion

Forty years of *Populorum Progressio* and twenty years of *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* – these time-spans are longer than the life expectancy of many, many people in my country of Zambia. With

stronger political commitment to the teachings on integral human development of these two great documents, I believe that we can move more hopefully, with the fullness of human life, into the next forty years.

That is our challenge. It is our hope and our prayer. Let it also be our action!

This is an edited version of the address given by Peter Henriot SJ at a seminar on *Populorum Progressio*, Peru, September 2007.

Notes

1. Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples), Encyclical Letter issued 26 March 1967; Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (The Social Concern of the Church), Encyclical Letter issued 30 December 1987.
2. *Justice in the World*, Document of the Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, November 1971, Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press.
3. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
4. W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960.
5. The objectives of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are stated by the European Union to be 'to establish new WTO - compatible trade agreements' between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Countries. Under, first, the Lomé Convention and then the Cotonou Agreement, the European Union concluded trade agreements with these countries, granting them specific trade concessions and official development assistance. See Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Economic Partnership Agreements*, Brussels, 23 October 2007, COM (2007) 635 final.
6. *Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*, 7 December 1965, in Austin Flannery OP (General Editor), *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (new revised edition), Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996.
7. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love), Encyclical Letter, 25 December 2005, London: Catholic Truth Society.

Peter Henriot SJ, is Director of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, Lusaka, Zambia

Pedro Arrupe: Inspirational Jesuit Leader

Cathy Molloy

Introduction

Does it seem strange that the role model for a centre for business ethics and for a hostel for the homeless is the same person?

The centenary of the birth of Pedro Arrupe has brought new interest in his life and work, which are being celebrated and commemorated this November, especially in his native Spain.

High schools and colleges have been named after him, centres for business ethics, for community-based learning, for creative leadership and for refugees have been named after him, as have scholarships and international solidarity programmes, institutes for human rights, university chairs, and societies and hostels for the homeless. From Dublin to Melbourne, Tokyo to Colombo, Washington to El Salvador, Manila to Nairobi, the name Pedro Arrupe is to be found wherever there are Jesuit institutions or works. What is it about this man, born 100 years ago, on 14 November 1907, and who died on 5 February 1991, Superior General of the Jesuits from 1965 to 1983, that has inspired, and continues to inspire, so many people, Jesuits and others, across the world?

Like Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, Pedro Arrupe was a native of Spain's Basque country. His life was buffeted by some of the major events of the twentieth century. Exiled from Spain in 1931 by the socialist government, as were all Jesuits, he studied in Belgium and Holland, worked in the US and Mexico, found himself removed from the war in Europe only to experience arrest, interrogation and solitary confinement at the hands of the Japanese, and subsequently to experience the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. By the time he was elected Superior General of the Jesuits in 1965 it must have seemed as if his life had at last settled down. But not so: his time as Superior General of the Jesuits coincided with the major period of renewal in the history of the Catholic Church that was Vatican Council II, and saw him lead the Jesuits through some of the greatest changes in their four hundred year history, leaving a legacy that it seems is only beginning to be felt and understood across the world. *Time* magazine, thirty-four years ago, carried a sketch of Pedro Arrupe on its front cover with the leading article entitled, 'The Jesuits' Search for a New Identity'.[1] The article described him as: 'a career missionary … the first Basque to head the order since Ignatius himself. Something of a mystic, also like Ignatius, Arrupe, now sixty-five, presides over the troubled order today with disarming calm and good cheer.' It is difficult for people today to have a sense of the turbulence that was widespread in the Catholic Church during and after the Vatican Council. Pedro Arrupe was thus at the 'coal face' of the renewal of the church and of the Society of Jesus. He has been described as the re-founder of the Jesuits.

Who was Pedro Arrupe?

Pedro Arrupe was the fifth child, and only son, of Marcelino and Dolores Arrupe. His father was an architect; his mother, who came from a medical family, died when Pedro was ten years old. He is remembered as being happy, good at soccer and an excellent student.[2] He studied medicine in Madrid and during his time at university he was greatly affected by his involvement with the Society of St Vincent de Paul and his experience as a medical assistant in Lourdes soon after his father had died. The effects of poverty on the one hand, and of strong faith on the other, left an indelible impression on him. Returning to the very secular scientific atmosphere of medical school in Madrid, Arrupe made the decision to abandon his graduate studies in medicine and join the Jesuits. This decision was supported by his sisters but received with dismay by a leading member of the medical faculty, Professor Juan Negrín, later Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic. His professor tried to persuade him to continue with what was sure to be a brilliant medical career.[3] In short, it seems Pedro Arrupe fell in love.
Later, words attributed to him say:

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide

what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings, how you will spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.
Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide everything.

The Route to Japan

From the beginning, Arrupe had wanted to follow St Francis Xavier as a missionary in Japan. Denied in the short term, his wish would be ultimately granted by means of a very circuitous route. Exiled from Spain, he continued his studies in Belgium and Holland focusing on medical ethics at a time when the rise of National Socialism in Germany was giving new urgency to questions of racial enhancement by means of eugenic sterilisation. Participation in a conference on eugenics in Vienna in 1936 taught Pedro Arrupe the critical importance of scientific work and the implications it can have for society. Here too he realised that theologians should engage scholars on moral issues only after acquiring a command of their disciplines.[4] And here also he experienced 'the virulence of racism that was gripping Nazi Germany and Austria'.[5]

Ordained in Belgium in 1936, just before the outbreak of civil war in Spain, which meant that none of his family was present, Pedro Arrupe was sent to the US to complete studies and Jesuit training where he worked with prisoners and immigrants before being sent to Japan as a missionary in 1938. In Japan, he was novice master in the Jesuit house outside Hiroshima when the first explosion of an atom bomb took place and he converted the house into a field hospital. His writings describe the events of 6 August 1945 when Hiroshima was destroyed – the blinding flash, being thrown to the ground by a hurricane blast, then seeing from a hill Hiroshima enveloped in a lake of fire and a mushroom-like cloud billowing up into the sky.[6] His efforts at rescue and treatment of victims in the aftermath have been documented, and as a survivor of the bomb he later went on speaking tours in Western Europe and Latin America describing the reality of what he had seen. Hiroshima became a symbol and reminder that the nuclear annihilation of the human race was a real possibility.

Pedro Arrupe was appointed Superior (Vice-Provincial) over all the Jesuit missions and ministries in Japan – 200 Jesuits from nine different nations – and then, in 1958, Provincial. 'The Jesuits he supervised in those days came to describe him as an indomitable optimist, perhaps too trusting of people, a visionary with great ideas who needed to be surrounded by realists, hard on himself, but always kind to others'.[7]

'In my whole life, if there is one man whose cause for canonisation I would support it is Pedro Arrupe.'[8] So says Fr Gerry Bourke, an Irish Jesuit now in Dublin, who was sent to Japan in 1951 and remembers Arrupe well, having served under him for twelve years. He remembers that Jesuits in Japan were surprised at his appointment as Superior General. He had been considered conservative by many, very loyal to the church in the dramatic period after Vatican Council II, while some believed him to be liberal because he was Spanish. At the human level, in Gerry Bourke's opinion, it was hard for Pedro Arrupe to leave Japan for Rome as he was very attached to Japan and the Japanese people.

Later, Gerry would have further experience of the missionary zeal of Pedro Arrupe. In November 1977, he received a letter from Arrupe, who was now Superior General, asking him to make a study of 'the feasibility and advisability' of the Society of Jesus accepting an invitation from the Bishop of Honolulu to establish a 'Newman Centre' at the University of Hawaii. Gerry recalls how over the next six years Fr. Arrupe manifested his continuing interest in the development of the project, particularly because of the opportunity that it offered the Society of Jesus to make a contribution to, and to learn from, the dialogue that was going on between East and West at the East-West Center on the campus of the University of Hawaii. In May 1980, he was invited to be present with Fr Arrupe at a meeting of the American Provincials in Spokane, Washington, where it was agreed to support the Hawaiian project. Thanks to the cooperation of the Sisters of St Francis of Syracuse, the Centre was built on East West Road, and now flourishes as the Church of the Holy Spirit, a non-territorial parish of the Diocese of Honolulu.[9]

Superior General in Rome

It is for his exhortation to the service of faith and the promotion of justice that today's generation of Jesuits, and those who have contact with them through family, work, education, best connect with Pedro Arrupe.

He was characterised by his promotion and defence of social justice, which led him to be misunderstood even within the church.[10] He had participated in the 1971 Synod of Bishops led by Pope Paul VI, at which a primary focus was the issue of social justice. The ensuing Vatican document, *Justice in the World*, with its pivotal statement on action for justice, was a turning point for many in the church in the renewal initiated at Vatican II. Perhaps the vision, enthusiasm, and optimism of Pedro Arrupe in regard to the core message of this document gave the Jesuits a head-start in implementing it. Their thirty-second General Congregation in 1975 enshrined it as follows: 'The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.'[11]

This decree is the basis on which centres all over the world, such as the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice in Dublin, were founded, and, perhaps even more importantly, the basis on which the issue of justice has been brought to the centre of all Jesuit works – schools and universities, parishes and spirituality centres, associations of alumni, houses of writing and publishing – in every continent. This is not being achieved without its costly implications being experienced, most notably in the murders of five Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter in El Salvador in 1985, but also in many other ways such as the censuring of liberation theologians, and even the divisions it has caused among Jesuits themselves in particular houses and Provinces.

In an address to American Provincials, Fr Arrupe, noting that the Gospel has social and economic dimensions that make it impossible for the church or its priests to be completely apolitical, said: 'We cannot remain silent, in certain countries, before regimes which constitute without any doubt a sort of institutionalised violence.'[12] And in a talk in 1981 to participants in an Ignatian course in Rome, later addressed to all Jesuits, Pedro Arrupe, speaking about the relationship between justice and charity, said:

Obviously, the promotion of justice is indispensable, because it is the first step to charity. To claim justice sometimes seems revolutionary, a subversive claim. And yet it is so small a request: we really ought to ask for more, we should go beyond justice, to crown it with charity. Justice is necessary but it is not enough. Charity adds its transcendent inner dimension to justice and, when it has reached the limit of the realm of justice, can keep going even further. Because justice has its limits, and stops where rights terminate; but love has no boundaries because it reproduces, on our human scale, the infiniteness of the divine essence and gives to each of our human brothers and sisters a claim to our unlimited service.[13]

Fr Cecil McGarry, an Irish Jesuit now based in Nairobi, who worked and lived alongside Pedro Arrupe in Rome, writes: 'One couldn't live long with Father Arrupe without realising the grasp he had of the characteristics of our age and the consequent apostolates required of the church. He attributed this gift to his presence to and reflection on the dropping of the first two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. These events revealed to him how our century had lost its sense of the dignity and value of every human person. Out of reflection on this experience grew his strong sense of the injustices of our world and the need to proclaim and live a faith that does justice.'

To claim justice sometimes seems revolutionary ... And yet it is so small a request: We really ought to ask for more, we should go beyond justice to crown it with charity.

'He would have been very happy if the Society of Jesus could have become a kind of commando force that put itself at the disposal of those dying and being destroyed by earthquakes, tsunamis and so many other tragic happenings. The Jesuit Refugee Service was one effort to achieve this, with the collaboration of many who were not Jesuits. He used often tell us that our apostolates would become infinitely more creative if we made our daily prayer with our eyes on the world and the dire needs of so many people. He was truly a prophet of the Lord in the twentieth century.'[14]

Theologian Fr Gerry O'Hanlon, of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice in Dublin, recalls his meeting with Pedro Arrupe in Milltown Park in 1980, not long before Arrupe's illness. He writes: 'I felt as if I knew Arrupe well even if I had never met him personally before that point. Through pictures, writings, stories he had become an

inspirational figure for me and for many other Jesuits. In addition, I had just come across a piece he had written on "The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism" which interested me greatly. In it, he had reflected on the Trinitarian experience of Ignatius and related it to the contemporary mission of the Society of Jesus involving the service of faith and the promotion of justice. I took the opportunity to go over to him before the grace was said at the meal in the Milltown Park refectory and told him that I had read his piece and found it very useful. I remember his radiant smile, his intelligent, sparkling eyes, his accented English and the great warmth which came from him. He wanted to know how the piece could be developed further: his smiling presence did not conceal that energy and dynamism which he exuded and which personified a sense of the Ignatian *magis*. This 'more' as communicated by Arrupe, was never moralistic in a burdensome way, but was attractive; it drew one outwards and forwards without sitting down first to count the cost. I left him with my heart singing.'[15]

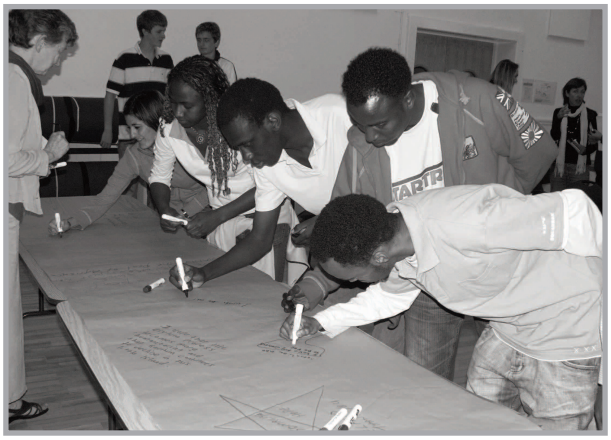
A Vision for the Wider Jesuit Family

An example of the 'more' that Fr Arrupe invited people beyond the immediate Society of Jesus to consider is present in the notable address he gave to the Congress of Jesuit Alumni of Europe in Valencia, Spain in 1973.[16] In this powerful and inspirational address, he pointed out that education for social justice is not simply about theory but requires change on the part of those who hear it. In strong terms he called for the education of 'men (now we would say men and women)-for-others': men and women completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce. He points out that making very concrete decisions in accordance with God's will is possible because at the centre of the Ignatian spirit is the spirit of constantly seeking the will of God and this is their shared heritage. In his address he conveys simultaneously teaching, exhortation to action, and love for his audience as much as for those who suffer at the hands of unjust people, systems and structures. He calls his hearers to three things:

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 counter-attack against injustice; a decision to work with others toward the dismantling of unjust social structures so that the weak, the oppressed, the marginalised of this world may be set free.



Pedro Arrupe's vision – Jesuit Refugee Service *© JRS*

The question 'What can/should I/we do?' so often asked by well-intentioned people is here clearly answered by Pedro Arrupe: a determination to live more simply; a determination to draw no profit from clearly unjust sources and to diminish our share in the benefits of systems favouring the already rich while the cost lies heavily on the poor; a resolve to be agents of change in society, resisting unjust structures and actively undertaking to reform them in cooperation with those who are oppressed and who must be the principal agents of change. The reality, as Pedro Arrupe sees it, is that we cannot separate personal conversion from structural social reform.

Inculturation – not treated in this article – and integration of faith and justice would become hallmarks of Pedro Arrupe's tenure as Superior General. He challenged Jesuits to risk the personal shock of being immersed in cultures or subcultures foreign to them, whether they be the worlds of outcasts and slum dwellers or those of artists and intellectuals. And so finding Jesuits at the forefront of work with homeless people, or refugees, or the *Dalit*, the so-called 'untouchable' people in India, or of significant conscientisation in regard to the place of women in the church and in the world, or more recently with those living with HIV/AIDS in Africa and elsewhere, comes as no surprise but rather as something that Pedro

Arrupe would have hoped and expected in addition to their more traditional work of education, parish ministry, and spiritual guidance.

Many Jesuits who took his challenge seriously opted for solidarity with the poor and oppressed in a variety of ways, some making the move from Jesuit houses to life in disadvantaged communities in towns and cities all over the world. Others have engaged in the attempt to give life to the teaching and example of Pedro Arrupe in whatever is their field of work. The leadership offered to Jesuits, and to the wider Jesuit family, by Pedro Arrupe is hugely significant for the work of justice in the world today. His own experience of living and working among different groups of suffering humanity, whether the sick in Lourdes or survivors of Hiroshima, prisoners in New York or exiled Spanish children in Mexico, remained central to his desire for justice and equal dignity for all human beings.

And yet to someone from the outside, who never knew or even met him, reading many of his addresses and reflections for the first time, it is Pedro Arrupe's closeness to his God in the person of Jesus that is the most striking feature. His own actions in respect of caring for people who are suffering, and his encouragement and exhortations to others in respect of action for justice, seem held at the centre by what can only be described as a two-way transparent love – his love of God and his love for all people, and the implicit certainty of God's love for him and for all people, especially those suffering human beings whose dignity and rights are denied them. Somehow, he comes across as the embodiment of that falling in love that will decide everything. And maybe this is his real significance for the work of justice today in whatever field, this justice with love which goes beyond rights and which distinguishes the charity of faith from the activism of justice without love. Certainly for the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice to attempt to live up to the model of work for justice proposed by the life and teaching of Pedro Arrupe is no small challenge. And as we meet with others from Jesuit works around the world in the course of that work, it is impossible not to have a sense that Pedro Arrupe is in some way strongly present in the people and the new structures, and willing and shaping the hopes and ideals of St Ignatius into the reality for the whole of creation that he believed is God's desire.

On 7 August 1981, Pedro Arrupe suffered a stroke which left him unable to continue in his role as Superior General. He died in 1991. The time of his illness and before he resigned in 1983 was exceptionally difficult for the Society of Jesus. Gerry O'Hanlon, in Rome during some of that period, recalls fascinating accounts of what was going on in the Jesuit Curia at that time but most of all he remembers 'that sense of intense loyalty and affection which Arrupe clearly inspired in those around him. He made holiness seem attractive.'[17]

Notes

1. *Time*, 23 April 1973 (http://www.time.com/time/magazine).
2. Ronald Modras, *Ignatian Humanism: A Dynamic Spirituality for the 21st Century*, Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004, p. 245. The account in this article of the life-stages of Pedro Arrupe is taken largely from Modras.
3. *Ibid*., p. 250.
4. This lesson was to have great impact on the work for social justice, with many Jesuits studying social sciences and economics before entering the field.
5. Modras, *op. cit*., p. 252.
6. Modras cites three works here, Pedro Arrupe, *Memorias del Padre Arrupe: Este Japón Increíble*, pp. 156–73; Pedro Miguel Lamet, *Pedro Arrupe: Un Explosión en la Iglesia*, Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1994, pp. 187–214; George Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe: Twenty-eighth General of the Society of Jesus*, Gujarat, India: Gujarat Shaitya Prakash, 2000, pp. 117–56.
7. Modras cites Bishop, *Pedro Arrupe*, p. 26.
8. Fr Gerry Bourke SJ, in conversation with Cathy Molloy, at 37 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin, October 2007.
9. Fr Gerry Bourke SJ, by email, October 2007.
10. Universidad de Deusto website (http://www.deusto.es/servlet/satellite/noticia), accessed 25 September 2007.
11. Society of Jesus, *Documents of the Thirty-Second General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, English Translation, Washington DC, 1975, n. 4, p. 17.
12. Modras, *op. cit*., p. 270.
13. Pedro Arrupe, 'Rooted and Grounded in Love', Address to Participants in Ignatian Course, and later addressed to all Jesuits, Rome, February 1981, par. 57.
14. Fr Cecil McGarry SJ, by email, October 2007.
15. Fr Gerry O'Hanlon SJ, by email, October 2007.
16. What follows gives just a flavour of the content of 'Men for Others: Education for Social Justice and Social Action Today', Address by Pedro Arrupe SJ to the Tenth International Congress of Jesuit Alumni of Europe, Valencia, Spain, 31 July 1973.
17. Fr Gerry O'Hanlon SJ, by email, October 2007.

Cathy Molloy is Social Theology Officer with the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice

A Horrible Warning? Lessons for Ireland from Michael Moore's Film, *Sicko*

Margaret Burns

Introduction

Michael Moore's film, *Sicko*, now on general release, dramatically highlights how the wealthiest country in the world, and one which spends a much larger percentage of its GDP on health than other developed countries, fails to provide an adequate and fair system of care for its citizens. The film carries its message through people's own accounts of being denied medical care or being required to pay exorbitant amounts of money for services; it does so also through the voices of people who have worked in America's health insurance industry and who reveal how, for that industry, the imperative of making profit takes precedence over enabling people to obtain care.

Sicko makes a person want to weep at the unnecessary human suffering that results from this system. But alongside the heart-rending stories, Moore employs humour to highlight the absurdity as well as the cruelty of the system. Sometimes the humour is unintended – as when it emerges that a letter we are shown, in which a woman's requests for referral for specialist services are turned down, is from 'The Good Samaritan Medical Practice Association'. Perhaps the Good Samaritan should sue?

There are undoubtedly many Good Samaritans working in US health care. But *Sicko* shows over and over how they work in a system that is structurally unjust and a shameful example of a country failing its own people.

US Census Bureau data show that, in 2006, 47 million Americans were without health insurance, 1 million more than in the previous year, and 8.6 million more than in 2000. Early on in *Sicko*, Moore draws attention to the fact that as many as 18,000 people a year die because of lack of medical insurance. The opening sequences of the film show two examples of the choices which may face people who do not have insurance. Both concern situations that are not life-threatening: yet how can it be right that a wealthy country would force one of its citizens to choose which of the two fingers he had lost in an accident should be re-attached – since the price of having both treated was more than he, and indeed most people, could afford?

Insurance that Isn't

For the most part Moore's film is not, in fact, about those who are without insurance but rather about those who could qualify for insurance coverage (through, for example, employer schemes) but who don't because of pre-existing health conditions and those who do qualify but find that the restrictions that are part of their insurance result in their being denied cover for needed care. And so we see a sequence where one insurance company's list of excluded conditions unfolds and unfolds until one wonders, 'what is left that *is* covered?' And we see a woman who had undergone surgery being denied payment because she had failed to reveal a minor, unrelated, medical condition in her original application for insurance. We see a middle-aged, and middle class, husband and wife, who had both experienced serious illness, and who had been made bankrupt as a result of medical expenses not covered by the insurance they held. Having lost their home, they now had to move State to live in the spare room of their daughter's house. Their distress and bewilderment at what was happening to them is heart-rending. And even worse still are the stories of how the failure of insurance to provide cover for critically important care had resulted in death.

Profit before People

The film shows a health system in which some doctors are paid, not to use their skills to care directly for patients, or to undertake research that might advance medical knowledge, or promote public health, but rather, as employees of private, profit-making insurance companies, to exercise their ingenuity to come up with reasons why patients should be denied treatment. A doctor and former employee of an insurance company tells Moore: 'In all my work, I had one primary duty – to use my medical expertise for the financial benefit of the organisation for which I worked.'

The insurance companies argue that their decisions do not deny people treatment – they only deny people *payment* for treatment.

Michael Moore is unhesitating in allocating blame for the unfairness and cruelty of a system that leaves so many with their health needs unmet and/or with unpayable debts. At the heart of the issue is the for-profit nature of much of American health care, which turns what should be a service to meet fundamental human needs into a business where the ultimate criterion of success is not lives saved, or pain eased, or health recovered, but simply profit. In effect, *Sicko* shows us what happens when a country ends up having a health *industry* rather than a health *service*.

Do other Countries do Better?

In the second half of the film, Moore visits Canada, France and the UK to highlight that health care systems that provide access to all, regardless of income, *are* possible, and that such systems are not characterised by the horrors which opponents of fundamental reform of the US system allege are inevitable in any form of 'socialised' health care. The film will be faulted for presenting an overly positive picture of health care in these countries, failing, for example, to examine the difficulties caused by delays in accessing services, or concerns about rising costs.

Yet, for all their problems, such systems reflect the commitment these societies made at certain points in their history to treat all their people as equal when it comes to accessing health care and thus to make health services available on a universal basis. The case for universal provision is well summed up by one man interviewed during the visit to Canada. Asked by Moore, 'Why do you expect your fellow Canadians who don't have your problems to pay for a problem *you* have?', he replies: 'Because we would do the same for them.' And then Moore asks: 'What if you just had to take care of yourself?' To which he answers: '[There are] lots of people who aren't in a position to be able to do that.'

However, Moore's film fails to draw attention to how comprehensive health care systems are increasingly under threat, not so much from rising costs resulting from new treatments and increasingly ageing populations, although these are undoubtedly very significant factors, but from an increasing encroachment of the private, for-profit form of health care that he criticises in the American context.

A Visit to a Near Neighbour

Even more than the rest of the film, its final section has the potential to raise the blood pressure of large numbers of its American viewers. Noting that there is one piece of US territory where people are entitled to top-quality health care free at the point of delivery, Moore, accompanied by some Americans with chronic health problems, makes an attempt to enter that place – namely, the US Naval Station at Guantanamo Bay. Needless to say, they are duly warned off attempting to land. Moore and a larger group of patients then proceed to try to access the health care provided in Cuba, asking that they be given the same, no less or no more, health care as is provided for Cubans.

Sicko shows us what happens when a country ends up having a health industry rather than a health service.

The resultant scenes where the US visitors have their conditions reviewed and then receive, free of charge, the care they need, are ripe for the criticism of being stage-managed. And yet … there is, for this viewer at least, nothing stage-managed about the sheer relief on the faces of the people concerned as they not only receive treatment but experience being treated as a person in need of care rather than a consumer of 'product' that has to be purchased at a prohibitive price.

Moreover, there is no getting away from the fact that they were in Cuba only because their own country had failed to provide the health care they needed. Most of the people who travelled to Cuba with Moore had developed their illnesses as a result of working on Ground Zero after 9/11 – working not as employees of the emergency services but as volunteers. One woman put it thus: 'I wanted to help; I was trained for this; you see somebody who's in need, you help them.' When these volunteers developed serious health problems that were the direct result of their work on Ground Zero, the reward for their efforts was to find the authorities resolute in their position

that since these were volunteers and not employees they were not covered by insurance.

As is the case with the treatment of the Canadian, French, and British systems, Moore does not attempt any wider analysis of the Cuban system. A number of critics of the film have pointed out that Moore makes no comment on the fact that a World Health Organization ranking of countries' health care provision, shown in the film, reveals the US to be in a better position than Cuba. To which one might say that ranking 37th, just two places ahead of Cuba, a country whose GDP is but a fraction of that of the US, is hardly much of an achievement for a country with the level of income and wealth which the US possesses.[1]

An Alternative Vision

In summer 2007, around the time that *Sicko* was going on general release in America, the Catholic Health Association of the United States, an umbrella group of more than 1,200 US Catholic health care sponsors and facilities, issued a statement, *Our Vision for U.S. Health Care*. The statement argued that: 'The U.S. has the obligation to ensure that no one goes without any of life's basic necessities, including health care.'[2] In outlining its vision for a reformed system, it argued that this should include the following elements:

- *be available and accessible to everyone*;
- *pay special attention to the duty of protecting the poor and vulnerable*;
- *be health-and prevention-oriented with the goal of creating healthy U.S. communities*;
- *put patients and families at the center of the care process*.[3]

Sicko vividly illustrates how far current US health care is from realising such ideals. The film is not a measured policy analysis of the system, and of possible alternatives. Michael Moore is a polemicist and he is using a form of mass entertainment to drive home his case. This film is not subtle; it is open to the criticism that it is emotive and does not attempt to give a balanced overall picture of the issues covered. Nonetheless, it remains a powerful indictment of the insurance companies, pharmaceutical corporations, and health providers who operate America's for-profit health care system, and of the politicians who are the willing recipients of the political and financial support of these industries.

The film concludes with a plea to Americans to devise a health system that would allow people to care for one another in times of difficulty. It asks them to draw on their own image of themselves as 'a good and generous people ... people with a good heart and a good soul' who look out for one another – as expressed, he suggests, in a long tradition of voluntary action and of willingness to lend a neighbour a hand – to create a more humane and just system of health care.

It Couldn't Happen Here – Could It?

Sicko is a film clearly made for an American audience; its exposé of the deficiencies of the US health system and its portrayal of health care in a number of countries with universal provision are aimed at convincing Americans that a better system is possible. But what are its lessons for Irish viewers?

There remains a question that we cannot avoid:
'If the public system isn't good enough for me, then who are the people it's supposed to be good enough for?'

The half of the Irish population that now has private health insurance is not subjected to the exclusions and the denial of coverage that the film so tellingly highlights as occurring in the US system. But we should be aware that it may well be that just two words protect us from the barbarity of that system – 'risk equalisation', the concept that risks are shared so that those who have chronic conditions, or who are older and more vulnerable to illness, do not have to pay more than the young and healthy for the insurance plan that they choose (or perhaps one should say, 'can afford'). But 'risk equalisation' has already been challenged in the High Court; the decision of that Court in favour of retention is now being appealed in the Supreme Court.[4] If in either the near future, or the long term, the challenge to risk

equalisation is upheld, Ireland could find itself faced with the sort of exclusions and prohibitively expensive coverage highlighted in *Sicko*.

Our Limited Sense of Solidarity

The risk equalisation of Irish health insurance can be considered an expression of social solidarity. But we should be in no doubt that it is a qualified kind of solidarity. Private health insurance in Ireland is no longer what it was when the VHI was established by the State in the 1950s – a means whereby people in higher income groups could cover themselves against the cost of illness, in a context where they were not eligible for public hospital care. For several decades now, everyone in the country is entitled to use the public hospital system – not entirely free of charge (except for those on medical cards) but at a nominal cost. But over the past decade increasing numbers of people have been taking out private health insurance, and a major reason they do so is that they fear delays in accessing treatment, and are concerned about the quality of treatment, in the public system. And so presumably the members of our Government, and the opposition members of the Oireachtas, and the senior officials in our health services (including in the HSE which is responsible for the administration of the public health system), and members of the media, and church leaders, and the key people in the social partnership process – in other words, all those who make policy or who are in a good position to influence it – have opted out of reliance on the public system. In present circumstances, people buy private health insurance, sometimes at a very high cost relative to their income, because they feel it is the only prudent option. Still, there remains a question that we cannot avoid: 'If the public system isn't good enough for me, then who are the people it's supposed to be good enough for?'

We may not have a health care system that operates in such a grossly unjust and uncaring manner as that portrayed in the Michael Moore film. But let us not make any mistake: the Irish health care system is structured to be inequitable. Unlike Canada and many western European countries, Ireland never came to a point where it made a commitment to devise a health care system premised on treating people on the basis of need, not ability to pay.

In many ways in recent times we have been making policy choices that are taking us further

A public or a private hospital bed? *© D. Speirs*

and further away from that principle. Dating back twenty years, to the cutbacks of 1987, our public system entered more than a decade of under-funding. Increases over the past number of years have been insufficient to create adequate overall capacity in the public system, given the depth and length of the period of retrenchment and given the growth in population, particularly of older people who are most vulnerable to illness.

The 2001 *Health Strategy* promised significant development of the public health system, including the provision of 3,000 extra hospital beds,[5] but that Strategy has in effect been left to grace bookshelves, with no evidence of any commitment to implement it.

Meanwhile, in a whole series of policy decisions the Government has been acting to build up services provided by the private sector for those who can pay. So, for example, we have had the introduction of tax relief for building private, for-profit hospitals, and, notoriously, the imposition of private hospitals on public hospital grounds. It now appears that some of the promised new minor injury clinics, which in the June 2007 Programme for Government were presented as public facilities, will be private.[6]

Inching towards an American-type System?

The decisions of the past few years have not only further entrenched the two-tier nature of Irish health care, but have handed provision of services paid for by the public system over to the private, for-profit sector. Thus, for example, instead of expanding public hospital capacity we have had the creation of the National Treatment Purchase Fund, which 'buys' treatment for public patients in

the private system. A promise to develop 'community nursing units' for older people was abandoned in favour of the continued expansion of tax-supported private nursing homes; extending private provision of homecare has been favoured above the development of the public home help system.[7]

It would not be true to say that the Irish health system is inching towards an American-style for-profit system: no, it is going there in giant strides. This development has occurred steadily, and stealthily, with no substantial public debate, no Green Paper issued to indicate the change in policy, and no honest admission that the 2001 *Health Strategy*, which promised a quite different approach, is no longer national policy.

Where is the Will to Change?

When brought into the public domain, individual examples of people's suffering as a result of the two-tier nature of Irish health care, or indeed of that other serious structural inequality in the system, namely regional disparities in provision, invariably provoke outrage and anger and calls for government action. But these periodic outbursts of concern have not translated into concerted pressure for change; the recent election campaign showed that in the end neither people nor politicians were prepared to give the creation of an adequate and just health system the priority it merits. Despite our claims to 'be good Europeans' we seem reluctant to look to what can be learned from European social health insurance models of health care. A study commissioned by the Adelaide Hospital Society, published in 2006, showed that a system of social health insurance would be feasible in an Irish context.[8] However, the creation of such a system would require a paradigm shift, so that we would come to see health care as a fundamental human right held equally by all people – one not qualified by income or determined by which part of the country a person happened to live in.

It may be incongruous that the US should rank so poorly in its provision of health care. But it is just as incongruous that, Ireland, a country that prides itself on its achievement of independent nationhood after centuries of colonisation, that relishes its economic prosperity gained over the past decade, and that is proud to be a republic, should tolerate what is happening in its health service. For not only do we seem to be resolutely hanging onto a system that is *designed* to treat people unequally – that is, in essence, a twenty-first century embodiment of a nineteenth century Poor Law mentality – but we seem increasingly willing to turn what should be a service that cares for people when they are at their most vulnerable into a profit-making industry.

Towards the end of *Sicko*, Michael Moore, issues a challenge to his fellow Americans about their country's health care system, by asking: 'Who are we? Is this what we have become?' Irish people looking at their own health system could well do with asking – and answering – the same questions.

Notes

1. In 2004, the United States' GDP per capita (US dollar purchasing power parity) was 39,676, whereas Cuba's was estimated to be 5,700. (UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006: Beyond Scarcity, Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis*, New York: UNDP, Table 1, Human Development Index.)

   United States' expenditure on health per capita in 2004 was 6,096.2 (at an international dollar rate), representing 15.4 per cent of GDP. Cuba's total per capita expenditure on health (at an international dollar rate) was 229.8 and expenditure on health represented 6.3 per cent of GDP. (World Health Organization, 'Key Health Expenditure Indicators', www.who.int/countries)
2. Catholic Health Association of the United States, *Our Vision for U.S. Health Care*, Washington DC, 2007, p. 2. (www.chausa.org)
3. *Ibid*., p. 3.
4. 'Risk Equalisation Appeal Opens', *The Irish Times*, 6 November 2007.
5. Department of Health and Children, *Quality and Fairness, A Health System for You – Health Strategy*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 2001.
6. Theresa Judge, 'Minor Injury Clinics May Go Private', *The Irish Times*, 23 October 2007.
7. Maev-Ann Wren, *How Ireland Cares: The Case for Health Care Reform*, Dublin: New Ireland, 2006, pp. 230–231; 234–235.
8. Stephen Thomas, Charles Normand and Samantha Smith, *Social Health Insurance: Options for Ireland*, Dublin: Adelaide Hospital Society, 2006.

Margaret Burns is Social Policy Officer with the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice