

FAITH IN PRACTICE: SERVING THE KINGDOM – A VISION FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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*The following address was given to School Principals in Brentwood Diocese, England,
on 3 October 2003.*

I really like reading newspapers and watching any kind of news programme on TV: Sky News, BBC, Newsnight and the London *Independent* are almost a daily diet, in addition to *The Irish Times* and RTÉ – the Irish television. But I do not like these three weeks that bring politicians to the seaside for their annual conferences. These conferences are of course important for the political health of the nation, but they are so predictable: the government party boasts of its past achievements and hopes for the future if re-elected; the opposition parties point to all the shortcomings and give their aims if elected. There is a lot of hot air, and I find the whole thing boring, except for the rather wicked sketch writers who puncture the parties' hot air balloons and the self-importance of their speakers.

In speaking about the kingdom, I will of course be covering some of the ground on party conference agendas. But not being a UK citizen, I hope not to speak in a way that would appear to be politically biased, though I have strong Kingdom prejudices. So hoping not to remind people too much of politics I will outline some of the great achievements of the second part of the twentieth century before dealing with some serious problems that cannot be solved by politics alone. I shall then speak of the Kingdom and of its place in our life. For this central part of my lecture I shall draw on the document of Pope John Paul II last June, *Ecclesia in Europa*. "On Jesus Christ Alive in his Church the Source of Hope for Europe" (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2003).

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

It is easy to point to what is inadequate in society and blame politicians for what discommodates us. But if we were to look back to the late 1940s and 1950s, we can only be struck by enormous changes in society, so many of them beneficial. In every area there are problems and much needs to be done, but if we think back we can only be astonished by the advances in our own and our parents' lifetime. Medical care has improved beyond recognition, and whatever its faults and delays is available to all people. Advances in medical research and surgical skills means that many people are alive today who would have died with the same ailment in the 1950s. The numbers and the standards of education are barely believable. Though too many still fall below the poverty line, there is not the same widespread deprivation and hunger that was to be found after the Second World War. There is a huge range of social services and innumerable voluntary bodies working for the good of citizens. Despite its problems transport is vastly improved. If the trains are overcrowded it is largely because more people are travelling. I could list many other examples of great progress. All in all we are all better off than our parents and grandparents.

URGENT PROBLEMS

Nonetheless problems remain. These could be listed at length. I will focus only on about a half-dozen, as my purpose is not so much a critique of society but an appeal for the values of the Kingdom. I will cite commonly acknowledged problems in order to avoid appearing to be party-political. What we will see about the Kingdom will apply to other problems also. The key point I would like to make about problems I have selected is that all of them are of concern for politicians, but politics alone will not solve them.

We are all aware of violence in society. We can have laws that will make the detection of crime more effective; we can seek a penal system that will deter criminals and seek their rehabilitation. But these are only remedies after the event. How can violence and criminality be curtailed? Politicians of all hues speak on the need to address the causes of crime, such as social deprivation, alienation, illiteracy or drugs. We have great resources dedicated to detecting drug dealing and helping people on drugs. But as in the case of crime, we do not see spectacular results.

There is much greed and dishonesty in society. It is corporate and individual, some of it on a small scale, some of it breath-taking in its complexity and extent. Some greed is criminal, and can be dealt with by laws, courts and prisons. Some is within the law. One citizen annoyed by one fat-cat called a new breed of pigs after a chief executive, I think it was Cedric Brown – the image of him feeding at the trough is delightful. But the corruption of greed is much deeper in society and beyond the scope of legal justice.

Laws too can be passed about the more glaring and ugly manifestations of racism, but it cannot cure racial attitudes and prejudices. We can have laws to protect the environment, but individual or corporate selfishness works against the good of our planet and the future of our children.

Everywhere we look we can see the limited achievements of politicians and of the great organs of society. They have done much; they surely can do more. It is not easy to be a good or effective politician taking up what the Second Vatican Council memorably called, “the difficult yet noble art of politics” (*Church in the Modern World*, *Gaudium et Spes* 75). The present disillusionment with politicians makes their task more difficult. The media, which should be the watchdog to protect democracy, can also hinder or block laudable political endeavours. The media can increase the level of cynicism about politics. There is no substitute for a political order. But in the end the ultimate prize of a just and peaceful society is beyond the powers of parliament or public servants.

THE CHURCH

If the development of a just, caring and healthy society is beyond the possibilities of politicians, what about the Church? It is not so obvious that the answer lies here either. The media image of the Church is as negative as that of politicians, or perhaps worse. A mixture of secularism, liberalism and scandals has robbed the Church of much of its moral authority. This erosion of the Church’s remit is a genuine loss to society. Again, the Church has allowed itself to become distant from people’s concerns. Its

language and symbols are not grasped. There is a fall-off in practice, which indicates that people do not value what the Church is offering, or at least the way in which it is offered. There is here a greater problem than packaging. Church institutions are not respected. We have all sorts of deviant piety and unhelpful knee-jerk reactions from the extreme right and left. There is confusion about Church teaching and a worrying insistence on rather minor matters by Vatican authorities. Recently a strange document on liturgy was leaked; it is one way in which civil servants or bureaucrats can influence and hinder policy they disagree with. Indeed politician leaders here could learn a lot about control freakery from some Church authorities. British political parties are new to it; the Church has centuries of experience. In some ways the Church is weaker than in any other period in our lifetime. What are we to say and do? Is it a matter of imitating *Candide* and turn to growing our cabbage? No. There is a road to hope. But to find it we need identify more carefully where the deepest problem of society, and also the Church, may lie. We have to do better than the media idea of the causes of our society's ills.

THE SOURCE OF OUR CRISIS

Though I am convinced that politicians have a huge role to play in the redemption of society, there are areas beyond their grasp. When we look at the main problems we see one underlying cause for all of them. It is not the only cause, but if it were eliminated, then effective solutions to the various difficulties could emerge.

The big sin of our time is selfishness. There is a pagan worship of the ego, as people seek what they want for themselves irrespective of the good or the rights of others. All the various forms of slavery in society, like violence, substance abuse, sexual deviance, have at their root people seeking what they want irrespective of the good of others. We might find a somewhat oversimplified example helpful. If somebody is drug addicted, why should they stop? You can tell them that drugs are bad for them. They may or may not believe you. Most likely, they either cannot or do not want to stop. And they need to feed their addiction, no matter who else suffers. It is not easy to convince people that they should not be violent, that car theft harms society, that insurance fraud is not victimless. In the face of moral statements the answer is too often, "But I want to, and I will." We experience the cult of the individual and of personal freedom and satisfaction.

In areas of individual choice it is still more difficult to convince people that their actions have a harmful effect on society as a whole. Against the liberal consensus I would have to argue that our society is not helped by marriage infidelity, divorce or loose sexual morality. Each individual will have his or her own reasons; we can have sympathy with their situation, but such choices undermine society. We can all appeal to human weakness and make allowances; in the end, it is ever the innocent who suffer the consequences.

To keep to the example of adultery. There was a time, when it was less common, when people had well-founded confidence in the fidelity of their partners. Now that the

authority of the Churches is lessened, and the climate of public opinion sanctions or at least tolerates adultery, marriage is less secure. The possibility of divorce further weakens marriage.

We can see the problem in art or in theatre. In the time of Shakespeare there was a common shared morality. Murder was wrong; regicide was the greatest social crime. Honesty was a clear-cut virtue. But now what can a playwright assume about the audience. What is now totally unacceptable? Very little, except perhaps at the moment, child abuse.

The media and politicians appeal to selfishness. It is all very respectable, but the bottom line on issues like law reform, immigration, taxation, racism, pollution, and drugs is frequently a narrow self-interest.

The selfishness in our society is not merely individual, but corporate. Moreover, it is not merely national, but international, especially as the richer countries impose their selfishness on those which are poorer.

If we look closely we will find at the root of all our problems, individual, national or international some form of selfishness. It will not be the only source of evil, but it will almost universally be a serious cause for the lack of human integration on the part of the individual or for the malaise in society.

The greatest human achievements are science, technology and art. These have transformed our world. But are they enough? It is fine to speak of reason and reasonable behaviour. But why are people unreasonable, why do they do what harms themselves and others? Is there something more needed for human happiness, even to the limited degree that is possible on this earth? It seems that all our efforts are in the end thwarted by selfishness.

Has God an answer to our difficulties, or is he leaving us to our own devices? No, for the Father sent Jesus with a blueprint for our lives and for society. It is still on offer.

A WAY OUT: HOPE

The recent document of John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa* is a long meditation on hope. He states: “possibly the most urgent matter Europe faces, in both East and West, is a growing need for hope, a hope which will enable us to give meaning to life and history and to continue on our way together” (EiE 4). The context of this assertion on hope is a very sombre reflection on growing secularism, on fear of the future and on fragmentation in society (EiE 9). He states that at the root of our pessimism is “an attempt to promote a vision of humanity apart from God and apart from Christ.” It has come about, the pontiff says, because we have made ourselves the absolute centre of reality: “abandonment of God has led to the abandonment of humanity.” He then quotes the 1999 Synod of Bishops:

“[It is therefore] no wonder that in this context a vast field has opened for the unrestrained development of nihilism in philosophy, of relativism in values and morality, and of pragmatism – and even a cynical hedonism – in daily life.”

(EiE 9)

The fact that the pope speaks of hope implies two things: one is that we have real problems – one doesn't have hope when one has everything needed. Secondly, the future is not dark; there is light and something to look forward to. But such hope lies in Jesus Christ and his offer to the world in the light of the problems we have outlined. Let's explore his message.

The first recorded preaching of Jesus is described in Mark's gospel as follows:

Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the Good News of God and saying: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the good news.

(Mark 1:14-15)

Through Jesus we are offered Good News. Its symbol is the Kingdom. Jesus developed his Kingdom teaching largely through parables and similitudes. We know them very well. Some key ones:

- The talents (Matt 25:14-30) – we are all gifted.
- The lost sheep (Matt 18:12-14) – God wants us to turn to him.
- The two debtors (Luke 7:41-43) – we must forgive one another
- The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) – we must care for one another.
- The barren fig-tree (Luke 13:6-9) – we must bear fruit.
- The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) – God patiently waits for us, accepts us and forgives us.
- The Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) – we must not look down on or judge others.
- The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) – we must moreover care for the poor.
- The rich fool (Luke 12:16-21) – riches will not buy eternal life.
- The tower builder and the warring king (Luke 14:28-32) – the Kingdom is a serious undertaking.
- The net with different fish (Matt 13:47-50) – evil is found around us and will be eliminated only at the end.
- The pearl and the buried treasure (Matt 13:44-46) – the Kingdom is beyond all price and is worth everything we might have or achieve.

The Kingdom is good news. If we were all to live according to these parables, our society would be changed beyond recognition. But it would not be an easy option. Jesus says that in face of the Kingdom we must repent and believe. When we look at society and see the problems of public life, of violence, greed, drugs, racism, hedonism and the neglect of the environment, we see that these can only be solved by conversion at every level. We will not solve these problems unless we, and others, have a change of heart. As we have already noted, saying to somebody addicted to substance abuse, "you are unwise in your behaviour," is not enough. People need strong conviction and determination, in reality a change of heart, which in Christian language we call healing and conversion. It

is a turning around, a recognition of the evil we are doing to others and ourselves in society. Conversion involves hope.

Conversion involves turning from evil and embracing the good. It is not abstract. It can be made quite practical in the marks of the Kingdom. The Church has meditated on the Kingdom teaching of the New Testament and has presented it in the liturgy (feast of Christ the King) and in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2046, 2816-2821). It is found in seven marks or values: truth and life, holiness and grace, justice, love and peace. When we examine these we find that they all demand conversion, they are all opposed to selfishness, they are all values needed for the health of society. The Second Vatican Council taught:

The Church...receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God. While it slowly grows to maturity, the Church longs for the completed Kingdom and with all its strength hopes and desires to be united in glory with its king.

(Vatican II, Church LG 5, see 36)

We examine the marks of the Kingdom, asking what they are, what is their opposite and the contribution they can make to our lives and that of society. Here we are dealing with values. But the true grasp of values involves experience as well as knowledge. A major challenge for educators is to provide Kingdom experiences for their students. Can school be the one place where children experience the Kingdom of God? We look briefly at each of the marks of the Kingdom. They are all interconnected and they overlap, but each has its own identity and focus.

TRUTH

Truth is what conforms to the real. When our words and deeds reflect reality, they are true. The opposite is lies and deceit in all their forms. A most dangerous deviation is the half-truth, which can often be more than half a lie. There is much untruth in the media, in advertising, in relationships.

In the bible we learn four important things about truth: God is truthful (Deut 7:9). Truth is a journey, “to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). We have to learn truth, from the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). We are to walk in truth (2 John 4).

Commitment to truth is demanding. Not only does it exclude the handy lie, the evasiveness from convenience. It is the basis of trust among people. We need to educate young people not only to the beauty of truth, but also to the presence of lies and untruth all around them in society. Truth involves a rejection of selfishness in words and deeds. Acts of truthfulness bring their own reward in maturity and personal growth.

Pope Paul II encourages us to look more deeply at the truth of the Christian message:

Everywhere then a renewed proclamation is needed even for those already baptised. Many Europeans today think they know what Christianity is, yet they do not really know it at all...Many of the baptised live as if Christ did not exist: the signs and gestures of the faith

are repeated, especially in devotional practices, but they fail to correspond to a real acceptance of the content of faith and fidelity to the person of Jesus. The great certainties of the faith are being undermined in many people by a value religiosity lacking real commitment.

(EiE 4)

Christian truth involves a relationship with him who is “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). The Pope adds:

Vigilant care must be taken that Christ is presented in his fullness: not merely as an ethical model, but above all as the Son of God, the one, necessary Saviour of all, who lives and is at work in his Church.

(EiE 48)

LIFE

Life is the most basic of all God’s gifts. It is opposed to death and destruction. Violence is an attack on life. Freedom is an expression of life. The slavery of addictions destroys or at least hampers life. What is living grows; anti-life forces impede development and growth.

The bible has rich teaching about life: life belongs to God; he is “the living God” (Ps 42:3). Life is the greatest work of creation, beginning with vegetation on the third day and reaching a climax on the sixth day with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:11-27). Jesus is the Light of Life (John 8:12); whoever lives and believes in him shall not die (John 11:25-26). Life is sacred, and all unjust taking of life is an abomination (Gen 4:11-15). God takes no pleasure in death, but seeks the life of all (Ezek 33:11). The flesh of Jesus assures us of eternal life (John 6:27-58). Meanwhile we are to live in Christ Jesus (Col 3:3—“our life is hid with Christ”); “to live is Christ” (Ph 1:21).

There are many ways of affirming life. It is not only a matter of avoiding unjust killing such as murder and abortion, or the risk of killing people through selfish acts like drunken driving. There are many people wounded, weak or vulnerable in our society. There are people with special needs – the elderly, those with disabilities that are physical, emotional or intellectual. Voluntary bodies serve many of these needs. Education is for life, not only then for the life of the student, but for society. Again, we are back to selfishness. It would be easy to ignore what threatens or diminishes life in others. Life-affirming actions demand sacrifice. It is only when we support life that we appreciate its giftedness.

John Paul II speaks of a culture of death in contemporary society. He names three signs: abortion, falling birth rate, and euthanasia. He calls on support of family values in this situation (EiE 95 with 90-94). He also points to a special role for women. Those who may have been hoping for a change of views on ordination of women will, or course, be disappointed. But he is strong on issues of dignity, equality, demeaning advertising and even suggests that work in the home might be recognised and even

financially rewarded (EiE 43). A very significant feature is his defence of affectivity and emotional life. I know that some feminists feel fobbed off by such language. But it is nonetheless true. The most human values are not, I think, the male ones, but those values which are shared by men and women, but more evident in women.

Another feature of the gospel of life is ecology. The use of the earth should serve the Creator's plan and allow life for others.

It cannot be forgotten that at times improper use is made of the goods of the earth. By failing in our mission of cultivating and caring for the land with wisdom and love, we have in fact devastated woodlands and plains in many regions, polluted bodies of water, made the air unbreathable, upset hydro-geological and atmospheric systems and caused desertification of vast regions. In this case too, rendering service to the Gospel of hope means committing ourselves in new ways to a proper use of the goods of the earth...safeguarding natural habitats, defending the quality of the life of individuals and prepares for future generations an environment more in harmony with the Creator's plan (EiE 89).

Sinners against the environment is selfish. It disregards future generations for the sake of immediate gain.

HOLINESS

It is unlikely that the words "holy" or "holiness" will feature much in the speeches of the autumn party conferences. Yet it is what society most needs. The basic need of holiness refers to what is cut off, separate, what draws and repels us in some mysterious way. It means what transcends ourselves, what raises us up to go beyond what is immediate and gratifying. It is what reflects the true goal of humanity. Holiness is not so much about prayer and piety, as about goodness, the goodness of noble actions and uprightness of life. The opposite of holiness is all sin and moral evil.

The most significant teaching on holiness in the bible is that God is the holy one (Hos 11:9) and his people are to be holy too (Exod 33:12-17). We are to be holy and spotless before God (Eph 1:4). Men and women are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27). We are indeed called to holiness, but its achievement is beyond our own powers. We have to rely on the Spirit dwells in us as a temple, making us holy (1 Cor 6:20; 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16). Central to the teaching of scripture is that holiness is about being, not primarily about doing. Doing good or ethical holiness should follow—the new life in Christ (see Eph 4:17-5:20).

It is the theme of holiness that points to key truths for society. If we are convinced of the sacredness or holiness of people, then there can be no room for racism. If we are conscious of our own frail but real goodness, then we can expand in hope. Holiness brings about self-respect, respect for others, for the environment.

The recent papal statement insists that the Holy Spirit is still at work today and that signs of his presence are not lacking. He states that there is a need to rekindle a deep yearning for God, especially in young people (see EiE 40). With new evangelisation there is need for new spiritualities (EiE 38).

GRACE

The word “grace” has, as a root meaning, the concept of gift. As a kingdom value it takes in what we receive from God in terms of life and holiness; it also includes what comes to us from others. Grace has the idea of beauty, goodness and gift. The radical opposite of grace is again selfishness.

In the scripture grace signifies above all God’s gifts that come to us in so many ways. “The Lord, God of tenderness and of grace, slow to anger and rich in mercy and fidelity” (Ex 34:6). “God’s grace, *hesed*, is better than life” (Ps 63:4). “Grace and truth” come to us in Christ (John 1:17). Grace in Christ abounds where sin was so plentiful (Rom 5:15-21). The Christian blessing is for the grace of the Trinity: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” (2 Cor 13:13).

The works of grace are opposed to self-sufficiency. We are all needy. We need God’s love and mercy. We need forgiveness from others. We need others. Human society is interdependent in a way that we take for granted. What would schools be like without the contributions of tax-payers, local authorities, publishers, authors, carpenters, builders, paper manufacturers, electricity workers, suppliers of gas, water, food and all the things that we take for granted in our work? An emphasis on grace expands our vision.

Even looking at Europe as a civil community, Pope John Paul II states that signs of hope are not lacking:

[W]e can perceive, even amid the contradictions of history, the presence of the Spirit of God, who renews the face of the earth.” He notes growing openness of peoples towards one another, reconciliation between countries, forms of cooperation and exchanges of all sorts, growing democracy and freedom, as well as the attention now given to human rights which most go hand in hand with ethical and spiritual values.

(EiE 12)

JUSTICE

When we use the word “justice” our immediate thought may be about law and its enforcement and judges dispensing justice according to law. But it is much wider. Moral justice is concerned with giving all persons their due. It further includes integrity. We are familiar with many of the forms which injustice takes: injustice, dishonesty, oppression or cheating.

The scriptural teaching on justice is complex and wide-ranging. It is above all right relations with God, especially keeping his commandments. God laid down a just law governing relationships with him and with other people. There is always a danger that law became separated from mercy, from love and became a burdensome and joyless burden (Matt 11:25-27). Having received divine justice shot through with mercy, we must in turn be kind and merciful (see Matt 18: 21-35). The key justice of the Christian is forgiveness: “Forgive one another as the Lord has forgiven you” (Col 3:13).

We continually see people's lives destroyed through injustice. We also see people destroying their own lives by the injustice of unforgiveness. We see victims or their relatives on the steps of courthouses expressing their legitimate anger. Of course people are entitled to be angry. But they do have to get beyond it into forgiveness. Money and compensation can help people into healing and restoration, into some kind of closure after injustice, but in the end they must come to forgiveness if they are to be totally free in the depths of their humanity.

It is in this context that we can appreciate the value in education of apologies, or forgiveness, so that in small things people can learn the freedom that forgiveness brings.

We need to widen our horizons to take in social injustice, world debt, injustice in the nations and between the nations. There is an important connection with politics. There is no government that would survive a really just social policy. The taxation involved would mean that the party would be kicked out at the next election. It is only by education of public opinion that politicians can risk moving towards justice. The present British Chancellor, Gordon Brown, is making some genuine movement about the debt crisis of poorer countries. But he has to be patient and bring people with him. Those who influence public opinion like Bob Geldof, the Pope are helping in the process of education for justice. Likewise in schools it is not so much the amount of money that is raised that is important, but the education in commitment and the vision of a more just society that is helped when pupils organise or support good causes.

John Paul II calls on us to build a city that is worthy of humanity and to work for a better social order. An important guide for this is the social teaching of the Church, which is based on the biblical message and on human reason encountering the problems of individual and social life; it is aimed at defending and promoting the dignity of the human person (EiE 98). He notes:

It contains points of reference which make it possible to defend the moral structure of freedom, so as to protect European culture and society both from the totalitarian utopia of "justice without freedom" and from the utopia of "freedom without truth" which goes hand in hand with a false concept of "tolerance." Both utopias foreshadow errors and horrors for humanity, as the recent history of Europe sadly attests.
(EiE 98)

Most important is the "need for courageous commitment on the part of all to bring about a more just international economic order capable of promoting the authentic development of every people and country" (EiE 100).

LOVE

Love is a complex word. It involves seeking what is good for another, or giving way to another. It takes in friendship, passionate concern for others or a cause, and ultimately self-sacrifice. The Greeks had three words for the different kinds of love: *eros*, *philia*, and *agapē*. Jesus summed up the law as two commandments, love of God and love of neighbour (see Mark 12:29-31). We are called to be loving in society (see Col

3:12-17); the early Christians were known for their love. The opposite to love is all kinds of manipulation, of abuse, or use of persons. Bullying is a clear absence of love. Selfishness is a radical rejection of love.

The New Testament sets out what is involved in love:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

(Col 3:12-14).

We can see from this text, as well as more generally from the New Testament, that love is not merely a benign “live and let live,” for it involves a set of proactive attitudes and approaches. It is not passive, like “I do no harm to others,” but a positive seeking for the good of others. The challenge in educating people to love is to find opportunities for young people to experience love, to reflect on the love that they themselves receive, so that they can see love as a great value. From the experience of being loved, the next step is to become an agent of love.

John Paul II calls on Europe to live its finest aspiration:

“May nothing that is genuinely human lack an echo in your heart...welcome everyday with renewed freshness the gift of charity, which your Lord offers to you and enables you to accept. Learn from him the content and the measure of love. Be the Church of the Beatitudes, constantly conformed to Christ.”

(see Matt 5:1-2—EiE 105).

He speaks particularly of that form of love, which is hospitality and has a strong stand on immigration.

“Everyone must work for the growth of a mature culture of acceptance, which, in taking account the equal dignity of each person and need for solidarity with the less fortunate, calls for the recognition of the fundamental rights of each immigrant. Public authorities have the responsibility of controlling waves of immigration with a view to the requirements of the common good...with when necessary a firm suppression of abuses.”

(EiE 101).

Public authorities have responsibilities as well as the Church in welcoming those in need, helping them to return to their own country and in creating “conditions favouring respect for the dignity of all immigrants and the defence of their fundamental rights” (EiE 103).

An important area for charity is to give new hope to the poor. Serving the poor, the Pope says, is serving Christ:

To love the poor, and to testify that they are especially loved by God, means acknowledging that persons have value in themselves, apart from their economic, cultural and social status, and helping them to make the most of their potential.

(EiE 86).

Such a commitment involves a respect of persons that would racism of any kind unacceptable.

PEACE

There are several aspects of peace. We can think of peace as quiet and lack of commotion. In this sense a cemetery is a very peaceful place – dead but peaceful. Those buried there have left behind the turmoil of their lives. The opposite of peace is strife and fighting. But the mere absence of conflict is not true peace. Biblical peace also demands harmony and order. Thus in the bible peace is well-being: health and peace belong together at every level. Peace is personal; it is familial; it is social. Peace is the enjoyment of all the benefits of justice (Ps 37:11). Peace is a divine gift for which people in the Old Testament continually pray. The parting gift of Jesus is peace, not however the peace given by the world (John 14:27); it includes power over sin and the giving of the Spirit (John 20:19-23). It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22).

We can easily condemn war and terrorism. But our society needs more than condemnation. We need understanding. We can rightly say that these are forms of selfishness. But there is surely more. A hedgehog is not an aggressive animal. But when threatened it does have sharp spikes. Why have we terrorism? Why are there civil wars and wars between nations? How is it that for decades there are poisoned relationships between countries like Pakistan and India, between Palestinians and Israel, between Christian and Moslems, between ethnic groups? If we examine these situations we will most probably find that in each of them most, if not all of the values of the Kingdom have been disregarded: truth, life, holiness, grace, justice and love. Without these there cannot be genuine peace. In our world there are uneasy alliances and treaties, ceasefires and peacekeeping. But genuine peace means more; it involves forgiveness and healing.

It is the need of understanding conflict that makes education for peace so important. If I do not experience conflict and try to understand it in the ordinary affairs of life, then I cannot be genuinely committed to peace on a wider scale. It is the painful steps to peace in family, in social contacts that educates me, so that I can extrapolate from my own experience to understand wider conflicts and work for their solution.

Pope John Paul II speaks strongly about the need for peace. Much of his language is traditional, but none the less valuable for that. He refers several times to the totalitarian ideologies that darkened the hopes of individuals and people on the continent of Europe. He is clearly referring to Nazism, Fascism and Communism. He refers to ethnic conflicts; such as we have seen in the Balkans.

More recent ethnic conflicts, which have again led to bloodshed on the continent of Europe, have once again demonstrated to everyone how fragile peace is...Europe with all its inhabitants needs to work tirelessly to build peace (EiE 112).

CONCLUSION

The papal document, *Ecclesia in Europa*, speaks of the urgent need for Catholic schools to bring the light of Christ to bear on the whole of life. They are to transmit Christian values (EiE 59). We need education for the Kingdom. This is not information but experience. To show in schools that the kingdom works, that conversion is good, that altruism and love are the way to fulfilment and that hope is a practical value that demands commitment. Our faith must be practiced. It must be shown to work. So long as it remains theoretical, it is just one of many beliefs. It is the experience of the Kingdom that brings about transformation. The Pope ends with a threefold exhortation before showing the Virgin Mary is the model for all our hopes and desires (EiE 122-125). In her, God has already achieved what he wants to do for us. And so he says:

Do not be afraid: the Gospel is for you.

Be confident: there is sure hope in Jesus Christ.

Be certain: our hope will not disappoint us.

(EiE 121).