

# Justice & Peace Spirituality

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Most of us were brought up to think of the spiritual life as the area of life in which we perform spiritual exercises like prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, examination of conscience, retreats, days of recollection and the sacraments. The rest of our lives, the other departments, were thought of as our material lives. We realized well enough that our spiritual life should influence our material life but we still thought of the two as separate departments or areas of life.

Spiritual life is not a department of one's life that can be separated from its other departments: physical life (health), social life (sport entertainment), intellectual life (study), economic life (standard of living), apostolic life, political life or career. The spiritual life is the whole of one's life in so far as it is motivated and determined by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus. The more we are motivated in everything we do by this Spirit, the more we can be said to have a spiritual life.

Spirituality is a matter of education of the heart. Spirituality implies a process of transformation. 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom 12:1-2)

Spirituality gives rise to a way of life and is in turn the result of a way of life. A way of life is holy when it is produced by the Holy Spirit and corresponds to the values of the Gospel. 'Spirituality' is the name given to the synthesis of gospel values which takes place in each person or community. A particular spirituality re-orders the values of the Gospel in accordance with the time and circumstances in which it is born and develops. (JPIC Manual, Rome 2000)

Now the first thing we need to learn about Biblical spirituality is that the Bible does not divide the human person up into a spiritual part and a material part – at least, not in the way we usually do. In the Bible, the human person is seen as a whole and not as soul inhabiting a body. This division between the body and soul that makes the human person a soul imprisoned in a body does not come from the Bible, it comes from Greek philosophy.

The point that I am trying to make then is that in the Bible a spiritual life or a life in the Spirit is not a matter of being moved by any spirit at all as long as it is spirit and not material. The spiritual life is a matter of being moved by God's Spirit rather than by any other

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spirit. The opposite of the flesh is not spirit in general but the Holy Spirit. The word spirit in spiritual life means the Spirit of God as opposed to any other spirit. Thus the opposite of the spiritual life is not a material life but a life of worldliness or ungodliness. (Albert Nolan, *Biblical Spirituality: The Life of the Spirit*, ch 1).

#### WHAT IS JUSTICE & PEACE SPIRITUALITY?

*It means to fall in love...*

Justice and peace is a personal involvement. It means to fall in love... everyday, every morning falling in love with the earth and the whole of creation. Falling in love with all human beings. Who are my brothers and sisters.

To fall in love is a wonderful thing. Your personal experience will tell you that. If you don't fall in love it is a tragedy. If you don't have this feeling of love then there is no need for Justice and Peace. Because Justice and Peace is not an ideological work, or a social work, or a political or purely pastoral work. Justice and Peace includes social and political analysis, social and political work (projects, campaign, actions...) but it is not equal to them (there is a real danger to identify them with Justice and Peace).

302 |

It is just a love affair. It is a love affair because you love... You love people one by one, concrete real people. 'You also love the earth which is frightened by an irresponsible way of using it' (Louis-Joseph Lebreton, 1897-1966, *Paths to God*).

Justice and peace spirituality may be defined as, 'a global experience of the immense love of God for humankind and for the creation, specially the poor and the victims of injustices of society and our own response to this love by a way of life, plus making the poor and the victims the cornerstone.'

*...a way of life enlightened by the love for those who are struggling and suffering.*

Justice and Peace spirituality is a way of life enlightened by the love for those who are struggling and suffering. Justice and Peace, I repeat is a 'love affair.'

Justice and Peace is not only a fighting process, it is also a loving process, *agape* – see Lk 4:16-20 and Rom 8:31-39.

#### HOLISTIC APPROACH TO JUSTICE & PEACE SPIRITUALITY

God has planned a wonderful story for the planet and humankind. You become afraid because it is such a wonderful story. The reality frightens you, makes you anxious and even revolt. Looking at Asia my mother earth (the land of my father and mother), wonderful women and men come to my mind.... Gandhi, Buddha, Mother Teresa, Thich Nhat Hanh, Aung San Sui Kyi from Burma. At the same time sorrow pervades my heart. Tsunami, trafficking of women and children, plight of migrants and people on the move, earthquakes, floods, garbage ...

Justice and Peace is an involvement to destroy the negative side of what has been the project of God, the divine plan of God. So the love story I have spoken about starts with the experience of God given to me and to others. Life I have received in order to fight. Life should be multiplied.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, he did not need our weeping and tears. He wants us to follow him on the cross. He wants to give us life and friendship of heart. We don't have to weep about the bad side of things like globalization, marginalization, exploitation... etc. We have to be disciples who follow the path of Jesus. We have to follow the path of Jesus who asks us to be brothers and sisters of suffering. Jesus wants action. So Justice and Peace is action of how to build a friendlier world and more friendly earth for all.

*We have to follow the path of Jesus who asks us to be brothers and sisters of suffering.*

#### ACTION IS ALSO SPIRITUALITY

Which type of action is required? Solidarity action, which is very much contextualised. These actions need to be rooted in love of Jesus Christ in creation and creatures.

- Justice and Peace comes from our own personal stories, each of which is important and very different. Our feeling of Justice and Peace may come from our own suffering if we are from poor families; from our own analysis, from our spiritual experience, from reading the Bible... We know many classical brothers and sisters who have changed their mind having seen dramatic social situations of injustice, e.g. Bishop Raul Vera or who was converted by the plight of the Indian people of Chiapas in Mexico where Bartolomé de las Casas had also been bishop.

303

Our own stories are correlated with:

- The word of God – the Bible, and particularly the prophetic books and the New Testament. A prophetic stance comes from reading of the Scriptures, especially the prophetic stance of Jesus and his stance for the poor and marginalized. The prophets Amos, Isaiah, show us at the same time a God who is tender to those who are involved in the promotion of people. Jesus just follows that, opening this process to all humanity.
- The Church tradition – the Church Fathers from the 4th to 6th centuries, the Social Teaching of the Church, and the Dominican Tradition (Catherine of Siena, Martin of Porres). Spirituality has to be rooted in all of these especially the social teachings of the Church: which is a way of facing challenges and helps believers to get involved with problems.
- Praying experiences and celebrations. Coming from prayer — ex-

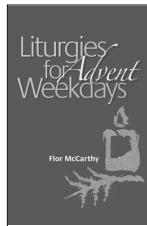
*We don't act for rewards, to be heroes or to receive thanks from the marginalized.*

perience that shows you, the unlimited love of God that is required of you. Unlimited love in order to break all types of chains.

It is important to have these issues in mind when we are introduced to Justice and Peace otherwise it can be called pure ideology.

Lastly, one needs to devote oneself in the field of Justice and Peace as a useless servant and just steward of creation. We don't act for Justice and Peace for rewards, to be heroes or to receive thanks from the marginalized. We don't work for gratitude, or to be congratulated by the Superior or General Prioress for the good work, the success we had, for the job well done. Or expect from the Master of the Order to appoint you as the future General Promoter of Justice and Peace. But because this is the way nearest to the Gospel. As Simon of Cyrene was just beside Christ who suffered – smelling his sweat, feeling his pain and accompanying him on the road to Calvary – so we are called to do actions that are efficient and effective in order to relieve his sufferings.

Just witnesses to that great love. Love will have the last word, and death will be the second last word, for love will continue forever even after death.



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