

The Way of Peace

ISSUE 2

Power and Domination

This is the second in a series of eight pamphlets offered by the Columban Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice focusing on peace and active non-violence.

Power used wisely is good. It is important to consider the dynamics of power because the powerful are often never conscious of their strength, but the weak are nearly always conscious of their weakness. Wise use of power, whether it be in a family or a nation, while promoting the common good, especially considers the most disadvantaged and respects the dignity of all involved.

However, to many, power means domination, which is contrary to Christian belief. Domination occurs when one group knowingly or unconsciously exploits another for its own benefit.

Some Elements of Domination are:

- ✦ One person or group defines what is 'normal', 'real' or 'correct'.
Eg. Media organisations which promote a particular world view and manipulate public opinion where the choice of words can create a negative perception ("loser", "illegal people", "terrorist").
- ✦ Unequal treatment such as bullying, discrimination or exploitation are part of the way things are done.
Eg. Poor countries which are locked out of fair trade arrangements, thus keeping them in a position of subservience, debt and poverty.
- ✦ A person or a group is socialised into an oppressed condition and actually assists the powerful to remain dominant.
Eg. Those of us who adopt a lifestyle which is beyond the reach of many, in response to promotion by the advertising and marketing industry.
- ✦ The culture, language and history of the oppressed group is diminished and that of the dominant group takes over.
Eg. Indigenous peoples colonised by powerful nations.

Our society is structured in such a way that many people are pushed to the edges. There are numerous examples of this. The exclusion of people occurs at all levels and in different institutions – families, schools, Church, multinational corporations. One effect of these structures of domination is that both the oppressor and the oppressed are dehumanised. Catholic social teaching calls us to challenge domination. We must ask who is excluded and who is included. Why? Who decides priorities? Who benefits and who loses?

Those who dominate use fear. They rely upon the blindness of ignorance and the seduction of arrogance. In direct contrast, wise use of power reflects the desire to build relationships of mutual respect, the desire that is central to God's plan for people, "To act justly, to love tenderly, to walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8).

'Do nothing from selfish ambition or deceit but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others'.

Phil. 2:3-4

These are the things that you must do. Speak the truth to one another; let the judgements at your gates be such as conduce to peace.

Zech. 8:16

'That there is serious disorder in world affairs is obvious. What kind of order can replace this disorder, so that men and women can live in freedom, justice and security? And since the world, amid its disorder, continues nevertheless to be "ordered" and organised in various ways – economic, cultural and even political – there arises another equally urgent question: on what principles are these new forms of world order unfolding?... Is it not the time for all to work together for a new constitutional organisation of the human family, truly capable of ensuring peace and harmony between peoples, as well as their integral development?'

Pope John Paul II,
World Peace Day Message, 2003

'Without justice,
peace is just a nice
sounding word.'

Dom Helder Camara

'The power of the media to shape human relationships and influence political and social life, both for good and for ill, has enormously increased... The fundamental moral requirement of all communication is respect for and service of the truth.'

Pope John Paul II, World Communications Day Message, 2002



PROFILE OF A PEACE PERSON

Phil Glendenning is the Director of the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education and National President of Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR). Over many years Phil has used his communication and networking skills to lead and educate others in challenging domination. His aspiration is that of the Edmund Rice Centre, which seeks a world where the needs of the poor take priority over the wants of the rich; where the freedom of the weak takes priority over the liberty of the powerful; and where the access of marginalised groups in society takes priority over the maintenance of an order which excludes them. Some of the many projects he has been involved in include the Sea of Hands, the Debunking the Myths about Asylum Seekers leaflets, and the Let's Talk reconciliation project.

What can you do?

- Form a discussion group or learning circle. Choose issues currently being reported in the media and ask the questions posed on the front of this paper.
- Recognise and affirm by letter those politicians and other community leaders who work for the common good.
- Support organisations like Caritas Australia or Amnesty International which work with and for oppressed peoples.

FACT FILE

1. In Australia, nearly one child in five between ages 8 and 17 is bullied weekly (Department of Education, Science and Training).
2. There is a direct path from child maltreatment to juvenile offending. Twenty-three per cent of children who have been reported victims of physical abuse subsequently offend (Australian Institute Of Criminology).
3. The poorest Australians are spending up to 62 per cent of their income on housing costs, such as mortgages and rents. They are being forced to go without specialist medical treatments, food and clothing to pay the rent or mortgage (Brotherhood of St Lawrence).
4. In a typical toy factory in China: the workers work shifts of 15 – 16 hours daily, seven days a week, receive 12 to 14 cents per hour wages, handle toxic glues, paints and solvents without protection, are fired if sick, have never heard of Toys R Us.
5. US\$29.4 billion is spent a year in the US on toys, many made in China.
6. Seven countries: USA, France, Japan, UK, Saudi Arabia, Germany, the Russian Federation, hold 48% of the voting power at the IMF and the World Bank.

USEFUL WEBSITES:

www.caritas.org.au
www.newint.org
www.amnesty.org
www.globalexchange.org



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