

(To the memory of Sheila Dwyer, founder and pillar of J&P Cardiff, now one of J&P Cardiff's and NJPN's communion of saints.)

The quarterly meeting of the NJPN took place in the Apostle Room of the Cathedral of Clifton Diocese. It was well attended with a good presence of J&P people from the local church.

The speaker of the day was well-chosen. She was Tina Beattie, theologian, mother and activist. She has long experience of doing theology in a context of the struggle of women for human dignity and the struggle of humanity for peace with justice.

Tina's input focussed on peace and what we could do to engage with society and its governors in the cause of Peace. She called for a Church which is truly pro-life, active in the struggle for the lives of the innocents in the womb, of those innocents who die of hunger and disease outside the womb before their time and of a threatened humanity struggling for the right to live in a dignified and sustainable way.

First she gave us the bad news which you and I are mostly familiar with. The statistics and statements brought to mind the theme of Apocalypse—in the original sense of unveiling and revelation. We are becoming more savvy regarding the way our globalised civilisation functions. We are learning about how the transnational corporations and financial institutions work, what their interests are and how they influence and manipulate our politicians. We know too of the temptation of rendering to Caesar what is of God. We heard the word "Gammon", a term used to describe how neo-conservative culture and religion in the USA is trying to ally God and Mammon, hence Gammon. In that country, which aspires to full spectrum dominance of the planet, the theology of wealth flourishes. That country, whose military budget is \$700bn this year, calls itself the world's peacekeeper. This country, about to build two aircraft carriers, also calls itself a peacekeeper, with a military budget of £33m this year.

Tina pointed out that in an economy dedicated to war the very modest political aims of full employment, social cohesion and education are more and more impossible of realisation. There is an increasing tension between the modest desires of those in the less well-off strata of society and the demands of an economic model which is fixated on growth and calls for the "creative destruction" of the planet Progress.

We have heard the outcry of those sectors of the media who have thundered about the spivs and the speculators. They demand punishment in the form of reduced or eliminated bonuses. But that just scratches the surface. The very economic model in which we have ciphered our identities as a nation and a people has become like a Moloch, devouring on its altar our souls now and the lives of future generations.

Tina made the bold assertion that the Church ought to make it as grave a matter the prohibition of war (and of arms trafficking) as the matter of the protection of life in the womb. It is also necessary to think seriously about the Culture of death which imbues our very way of being a people and nation. It is not enough to be against abortion. We must also be against capital punishment. We must be against war and pro-active for peace. This is a seamless garment approach to all of life for all of life is equally precious and beautiful in the sight of God.

The teaching Church must help us to explore ways of being truly pro-life in function of building a culture of peace and a civilisation of love. As a nation we must withdraw from war and aggression and promote the possibility of non-combatant roles in military service. We must exclude military recruiters from schools. We must pressure our government to legislate for ecological justice in the same way that we aspire to a society based on economic justice. And if we find ourselves in war zones or zones of civil or racial conflict, that peacekeepers have powers that are effective and so avoid the repetition of what happened in Bosnia and Rwanda not many years ago.

My wife Tirke said that Tina's talk pushed all the buttons and rang all the bells. I guess that about sums it up.

The rest of the meeting was fairly routine, but there are agenda items worthy of our attention, reflection and prayer.

One is Ethical Investment. I almost skipped this as taken for granted but in the light of the recent disclosures of how the Church of England has handled some of its finance we shall be very attentive to how our own Church behaves in the corridors of finance. There is a report in this week's Tablet (Sept 27) which says that our church's "masters of the universe" have a Midas touch.

The topic of the future of NJPN was raised. Yes, we do have an uncertain future, one that we do not yet know or own. The Executive is seeking ways forward, new contacts and networks. This is an ongoing concern and we can only walk the way with hope, discernment and confidence.

Related to the question of future is the question of the charism (gift, grace) of NJPN. Charism brings us back to the graced beginnings of the network, the historical and ecclesial moments, the challenge which NJPN wanted to address. It also brings up the Mission of the network, what it felt itself *sent* to do. Have there been changes of direction or of task? And finally, the present, the surrounding reality, the environment, the reality of the people and the world at this time. How does NJPN want to respond? What areas require particular attention?

It is a cause for rejoicing that the NJPN is a place where so many J&P people and issues can meet and interact. Listening to the Diocesan and Agency reports we can feel that an awful lot of work and effort is being expended by a great many people. The NJPN is a place where those struggling with the problems of migrants and refugees, the homeless and jobless, the environment, fairly traded goods, sex trafficking etc can meet, share and network. Of this NJPN can be justly proud.

Finally, the challenge of Living Simply is taking on greater significance. That significance derives much of its import from the moment which we are living, namely, the meltdown of the West's financial structures. We have had a short era of about ten years in which many Wall Street and City traders have been living high off the hog of their bonuses—the very opposite of Simply. At the same time there are one billion poor who live so Simply as to be at continued risk of their lives and health.

Those of us who attended the Conference at Swanwick heard the phrase, "What we need is more capitalism, not less." I am still reeling from that appalling statement. My mind went directly to those of the "bottom billion". What capital assets do they have? They have the strength of their arms, the creativity of their imaginations, and—sadly—their children whom they will give away, or trade away or see die in their arms. They live so far to the margins that they cannot capitalise on those assets. Perhaps that is a good thing. Our globalised capitalist system has become a Moloch upon whose altars thousands are sacrificed daily. To live simply in this context is to give a prophetic witness against the idolatry of the times, against unjust poverty which is an insult to God's holiness and for a social order—sign of the Reign of God—in which all can live growing in the fullness of life.

The rock star Bono said this recently:

"It's extraordinary to me that the US can find \$700bn to save Wall Street and the entire G8 cannot find \$25mn to save 25,000 children who die everyday from preventable diseases."

Frank Regan
September 2008

SUMMARY OF TINA BEATTIE'S TALK AT NJPN MEETING 20 SEPTEMBER 2008 AT CLIFTON CATHEDRAL,
BRISTOL

Tina Beattie: THE TRANQUILLITY OF ORDER: BUILDING PEACE IN TROUBLED TIMES: Tina set out to give a “dreary sketch of the state we’re in with regard to war and the economy” then to ask “how our Christian tradition offers us the resources to live as signs of hope in such a world, or in the words of St Augustine, to discover ‘the tranquillity of order’ which peace offers.” She reminded us that the word “crisis” is Greek in origin and signifies a time of opportunity as well as risk. How might the present crisis in global finance be a graced moment for a new vision of justice rooted in new economic order? But this meant facing up to the cost and futility of war: The human cost; at the beginning of the 20th century, civilian casualties made up 5% of the total; In Iraq today it is estimated to be 90%. She read a poem by Mahmoud Darwish, *Murdered Houses*, expressing how it is not only the loss of lives, but the destruction and loss of meaning and sense of belonging that this entails. The economic cost: Britain is now the second largest military spender after the USA. In 2005, Britain spent 5 times as much on defence as on overseas development, and 50 times as much as on efforts to tackle climate change. (*Stockholm Institute 2007 Year Book*). The military is also a significant source of pollution. Distortion of scientific endeavour: A report by Scientists for Global Responsibility, *Soldiers in the Laboratory* demonstrated that 30% of Britain’s research and development budget goes on military research (approx £2.6b), while research into conflict prevention, poverty alleviation, environmental protection, renewable energy technologies, disarmament and peacebuilding initiatives gets a fraction of the investment, despite yielding clear benefits at less cost. The producers of the report called for a more inclusive concept of security than military technology and the use of force.¹

In the light of all this “**the single most revolutionary move the Catholic Church could make would be to make it as difficult for its followers to support war as it currently is for them to support abortion.**” Pope John Paul II’s 1995 encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*² condemns the West’s “culture of death”, not only in relation to abortion and euthanasia, but to anything opposing life, e.g. torture, subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, prostitution and trafficking; it also finds signs of a “culture of life” in a growing public opposition to the use of war as a means to resolve conflict and a search for nonviolent alternatives, and opposition to the death penalty. However, in 2004 the then Cardinal Ratzinger wrote to the Archbishop of Washington saying that “There may be legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty” (so that support or involvement in these would not exclude an individual from the Eucharist) “..but not however with regard to abortion and euthanasia.”³ But we can, she suggested, “stop short of absolute pacifism, and still mount a very effective campaign of Catholic resistance to war, putting into practice what is already there in post-conciliar church teaching.

- Catholics could be forbidden to take part in the aggression of war but fulfil our duties as citizens by giving support in non-combatant roles.
- We should say that no Catholic can with a clear conscience work in or invest in the arms industry, and Catholic politicians should be scrutinised for their attitudes to war.
- The military should not have access to Catholic schools for the purposes of recruitment, and pupils made aware of the conflict between the Catholic faith and the politics of war;
- Pressure should be brought to bear on governments to channel resources into scientific projects for poverty reduction, the environment etc.
- Military budgets should be targeted at peace-keeping not war making, including work towards a more robust and effective UN peace-keeping force.

So, how can we bring about change in the world? Our means are limited, but we can do things in our own lives to “be the change I wish to see”, responding to the transformative vision of the world given us by Jesus. Tina described how she had gradually discovered the LiveSimply campaign to be “one of the richest and most sustaining visions ...in terms of Christian faith and its practical significance.” Using public transport, for example, creates spaces when the journey can simply be enjoyed. **LiveSimply is “a form of personal spirituality which brings our innermost desires and struggles into harmony with our political visions for justice and peace...”** The theology of Thomas Aquinas was another discovery which could help us “reconnect nature and grace, the word and the world.” For Aquinas, all creation is destined for eternal union and joy with God. The difference for human beings is that we are free to reject that vision. All human desires are a potential channel for grace; but when we fail to recognise God calling to us through them, they become distorted and lead to cravings which we cannot satisfy. Thus in our consumerist societies “we are experiencing the quiet despair of the human animal cut off from its source and purpose.” We are also social animals and need human institutions to foster the social means for human flourishing; but these too can become distorted and are then corrupt and unjust. Mary’s Magnificat provides us with a manifesto in which we can see God’s grace where others see only despair. We are called to inhabit the **real** world of Mary “which is woven together out of the fabric of ordinary lives, fragile, capable of great suffering as well as joy, dependent on the earth which nourishes us and the communities which sustain us, and always vulnerable to the **unreal** power of wealth, greed, corruption, oppression and violence”. That unreal world has been overthrown by her Son, revealing the tenderness and compassion of God. “This beautiful world is the world of our vulnerable, tender and compassionate God, made for our delight and enjoyment. **We can become the change we wish to see, by enjoying the world more and consuming it less, by peacekeeping rather than warmaking, by the persistent, quiet determination to allow hope to flourish, and ultimately to overwhelm the despair of our times.**”

¹ Chris Langley, *Soldiers in the Laboratory: Military involvement in science and technology – and some alternatives*, edited by Stuart Parkinson and Philip Webber, published by Scientists for Global Responsibility (SGR), January 2005. Downloadable at www.sgr.org.uk/ArmsControl/Soldiers_in_Lab_Report.pdf

² Available on the Vatican website http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/

³ Cardinal Ratzinger, memorandum to Cardinal McCarrick made public in July 2004, available on the website <http://www.priestsforlife.org/>

This is a summary of a talk given by Tina Beattie at the NJPN Networking Day in Bristol, 20.09.08. The emphases are mine. *Ann Kelly*