

Social Justice

Wednesday this week, 20th February, was marked by the United Nations as World Day of Social Justice. It is worth quoting from the official website:

“Social justice is an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations. We uphold the principles of social justice when we promote gender equality or the rights of indigenous peoples and migrants. We advance social justice when we remove barriers that people face because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture or disability.

For the United Nations, the pursuit of social justice for all is at the core of our global mission to promote development and human dignity. The adoption by the International Labour Organization of the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization is just one recent example of the UN system’s commitment to social justice. The Declaration focuses on guaranteeing fair outcomes for all through employment, social protection, social dialogue, and fundamental principles and rights at work.” [End of quote]

The theme for this year 2019 is: If You Want Peace and Development, Work for Social Justice. To quote some official statistics:

“The ILO estimates that currently about 2 billion people live in fragile and conflict-affected situations, of whom more than 400 million are aged 15 to 29. Job creation, better quality jobs, and better access to jobs for the bottom 40 per cent have the potential to increase incomes and contribute to more cohesive and equitable societies and thus are important to prevent violent conflicts and to address post-conflict challenges.” [End of quote]

I do not imagine that we would disagree with any of that. Social justice is one of the important factors that contribute to peace and reconciliation in our world today. Yet social justice should also be of particular concern to us as Christians. For it is such a strong theme that underpins the message of the Bible.

We heard just now those uncompromising verses from the book of Proverbs (Proverbs 14.31-34; 31.8-9). Treating those who are particularly vulnerable, the poor and needy, not only makes sense in terms of creating a better world but is also a religious imperative. Injustice is a sin not just towards those who are oppressed but also towards God.

Strong words indeed. If we truly believe that all are made in the image and likeness of God then that message of justice needs to be articulated and heeded. Of course Christians have not always been good at practising social justice themselves. With God’s help we ourselves need continually to be challenged in terms of our attitudes, our actions, our lifestyle.

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