



Environmental Justice

Ethics in Action for Sustainable and Integral Development



Does Justice Exist, at Least in Potency, in our Contemporary Global World?

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‘Remota itaque iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia?’ (St. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, IV, 4; PL. 41, 115).

The vision of humanity to which the Magisterium of the Church refers begins with the assumption that there exists a ‘universal order’ willed by God within which mankind not only lives and but also tries to live well and with respect for the planet. As a result, partnership based on truth, love, freedom and justice between man and nature is possible. The most acute social issues of the beginning of the third millennium, such as reducing local and global inequalities in the distribution of market and non-market goods, access to knowledge, intellectual and moral education, sustainable growth and development, and the protection of the environment, climate and natural resources, require a revisiting of the forms of global relations.

After the Second World War, with increased awareness of the basic equality of all the peoples of the world, and with the recognition of human rights, various organisations were created to promote co-operation between the world’s peoples. In general terms, the efforts and dynamics of the post-war period towards a more co-operative world were praiseworthy insufficient, especially with regards to the new environmental issues.

Aware of this disparity, inequality and divergence, and in order to eradicate extreme poverty and

hunger in the world, rich nations from the 1980s onwards have been committed to providing forms of aid. However, in general, aid commitments have not been honoured.

We may observe that these broken promises – which undermine the trust of the poor on which all exchanges, contracts and agreements are based – is the first form of international injustice present in the world today.

What emerges today is that when we look at individual nations, there is some justice or at least imperfect justice, especially in European countries that have a strong Christian influence in their history. However, evident signs of injustice emerge if we adopt a global vision of the world population. In the current international order – which involves dehumanising democracy and capitalism – we can see unequal divisions that we regard as unacceptable, without by this accepting as a model the cutting of the cake into equal parts, a model which perhaps has never stopped troubling the dreams of a just distribution which run the risk of leading the theory of justice up a blind alley. When we think of the problems of hunger and thirst we do not think of equal distribution but of decent provisions and we are shocked by what Paul VI, as long ago as 1972, condemned as the unacceptable 'drama of hunger in the world'.¹

We may also observe that sanctions appear to be disproportionate compared to the damage or support that are arbitrarily handed out to some people and not others – in short, we discern retributions that are not deserved. Without mentioning old and new protectionism, it is clear that some strategies for lowering pollutant gas emissions call for the internationalization redistribution of environmental costs, which would risk imposing burdensome commitments on countries with fewer resources to reduce emissions comparable to those of the more industrialized countries. Imposing such measures penalizes those countries most in need of development. Here also, the poor end up paying the price.

Corporate lobbying is an ulterior form of injustice; this exists with the corruption of the democracies that become plutocracies. Or rather, when a democracy is dominated directly or indirectly by corporations, or multinationals, which are solely concerned with their own agenda and profits. For example, in many countries, these corporations take land from small-scale farmers or landowners by using threats (that can lead to death), because they know that their land is rich of oil, minerals or, in some cases, can be used to power clean energy. Due to this transformation of democracies into plutocracies, these practices cannot occur without the acquiescence or negligence of the state. This is a clear example of the failure of justice.

Finally, we cannot fail to consider, as a serious injustice of our contemporary world, the catastrophic migrations – caused by unjust wars and human-induced climate change – that are placing over 65 million human beings at grave risk the world over, including 28 million forcefully displaced children. Injustice is at the base of these migrations, but also it is also in the form of receiving these migrants.

We can say that in today's international order five forms of human injustice exist which can be summed up in promises that are not kept, the continuation of unequal distribution, disproportionate redistribution, the bullying associated with corporate lobbying, and states that do not want to accept migrants, although sometimes they have contributed to causing the distress that generates these migrations. In addition, as denounced by *Laudato Si'* and the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for the first time in history, we are faced with the issue of climate change or global warming, caused by human activity.

We need new mechanisms to implement justice in our globalised world. As Pope Francis said: "Injustice is not invincible" (LS, § 74). Faced with these current forms of injustice, we need Prophets, like Elijah or Isaiah, that can convert the feeling of indignity – provoked by this injustice – into prophetic and revolutionary solutions that can change our current world order.

The aim of this meeting is to find these solutions by following the prophetic inspiration of Pope Francis, in collaboration with other religious leaders, and in synergy with the U.N.

1 [Papal Addresses](#), p. 205.