
THE IRISH
COMMISSION
*FOR JUSTICE
& PEACE*

THE IRISH COUNCIL
OF CHURCHES

**what
the
Bible
says
about
JUSTICE**

This Study Guide has been prepared with adult/young adult groups in mind, and could be used in various ways: as a basis for Bible Study and Discussion Groups; as a classroom resource for older pupils and teachers; as a topic for an inter-church group to examine; as a general introduction to the issues for students, clergy and others. In keeping with the other booklets in this series, it has been aimed at the general reader rather than the specialist.

"What the Bible Says About Justice" was written by **Sister Patricia Murray IBVM** and edited by Norman Richardson. We also wish to thank Dr. John Barkley and Dr. John Greehy for their most helpful comments and advice.

First published January 1985

Reprinted June 1986

© Irish Council of Churches

Irish Commission for Justice and Peace

CONTENTS

Foreword

Paper 1 - Yahweh the Deliverer and Liberator

Paper 2- The Cry of the Poor

Paper 3- Doing Justice - The Prophetic Call

Paper 4- Good News to the Poor

Paper 5 - Blessed are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for
Justice

Paper 6- Doing the Truth in Love

Footnotes

Useful Reading

FOREWORD

The Prophet Amos gives a dire warning to those who seek to win God's favour by lavish worship but who will not concern themselves with those in need.

Today, as part of their prophetic role, the Churches, in using phrases like "an option for the poor" or "a just, participatory and sustainable society", recognise that we cannot love God without responding to the just demands of our neighbours. This is not a new theme, but each generation has to search out the application of the principle in line with the problems of the age.

"What the Bible Says About Justice" reflects the increasing attention which Churches in Ireland give to the theme of Justice and the scriptural authority on which it is based. Its publication also marks another stage in the Peace Education Programme of the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace. This programme has become an important part of the reconciliation process in Ireland and is a practical example of Christian partnership between Roman Catholics and Protestants.

David W. Bleakley

(General Secretary, Irish Council of Churches)

Jerome Connolly

(Executive Secretary, Irish Commission for Justice and Peace)

Biblical quotations are from "The Common Bible" (1973 - Revised Standard Version text) published by William Collins Sons Et Co. Ltd., and used by permission of the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

"Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12)

PAPER 1

YAHWEH THE DELIVERER AND LIBERATOR

JUSTICE AS A CENTRAL THEME

Taking the Bible as a whole there is one central theme: God's dealing with His people. God is just and calls upon all men and women to be just and to work towards establishing a society which reveals God's justice. From their experience the Hebrews who lived a nomadic life knew that it was impossible for an individual to survive apart from the community. The decisive event in their lives was the Exodus, where their God led them from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. This was an act of social and political liberation but it also led to the establishment of the Covenant. This was a binding mutual commitment between the liberating God and the liberated people, which created a new community. This covenant meant doing God's will and God's will demanded that justice should be made a concrete reality in the inter-personal relationships of people, and if people did not act justly they would be judged. God has promised to be the protector of His people particularly of the poor and oppressed. The covenant community must give each person protection and security by expressing their sharing of belief by a sharing of goods.

THE MEANING OF JUSTICE

Justice has many meanings in the Old Testament. It is used in legal codes to draw up rules and regulations to bind the community. It prescribes restitution for an injury done to persons or property. Laws are just when they lead to harmony within a community. Paths are called just when they fulfil their function and lead to a destination or goal. The person who acts justly is seen as one who helps to sustain the life of the community:

"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

The biblical idea of justice has been summed up as "a harmony which comes from a right relationship to the covenant Lord and to the neighbour to whom a person is related by covenant bond".

JUSTICE AS LIBERATION

The whole of the Old Testament revolves around the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt, and the establishment of the covenant. These events involve confrontation, struggle and decision which finally lead to freedom. The people become a nation, building their life and future on the liberating power of God:

"I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage . . . and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:6-7).

YAHWEH THE LIBERATOR 2

Yahweh has shown himself to be the liberator of an oppressed people. Concern for the defenceless, the oppressed and the poor is rooted in the very nature of God: ". . . (The Lord) executes justice for the oppressed; . . . gives food to the hungry . . . sets the prisoners free" (Psalm 146:7). He is called "lover of justice" (Psalm 99:4). "He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity" (Psalm 98:9). Israel is called to change herself and to become a people after Yahweh's heart. She must "keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19).

FOR GROUP WORK:

1. Discuss the biblical idea that the individual cannot survive apart from the community
2. We must form society "after Yahweh's heart". From some Old Testament texts can you describe what such a society would be like? (Deuteronomy 15:4; Leviticus 19:18; Leviticus 25:54--55; Proverbs 3:27-32; Proverbs 29: 1-27).
3. In the Old Testament who in particular were seen to be defenceless, poor or needy? (Exodus 22:20-27; Deuteronomy 24:14-29; Deuteronomy 23:19-20; Exodus 23:12; Psalm 82:2-4).

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. How is the individual viewed in relation to society in today's world? 2. How does the biblical understanding of justice tie in with the popular understanding of justice as "giving each person his/her due"?
3. What is the meaning of peace or harmony (shalom) as understood from scripture? (Consult the companion booklet in this series - "What the Bible says about Peace").
4. How can this harmony be achieved by the individual: (1) within himself/herself, (2) with others, (3) with his/her environment, (4) with God?
5. Who are the marginalised and oppressed in today's world?

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

1. Think about the life of some person that you know or have read about who follows "the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice".
2. What is the difference between mercy and justice?
3. Do I see myself as a champion of the poor or as an apologist for the rich?
4. If acting justly means "to sustain the life of the community" how can I act to sustain life in my own community?

PAPER 2

THE CRY OF THE POOR

SALVATION

The history of the Hebrews shows that they came to understand more fully the meaning of salvation. From simply meaning physical deliverance (from Egypt, sickness, slavery, etc.) it came to include moral deliverance (e.g. neglect of the poor and needy, oppression of the widow and orphan, injustice in business, exploitation of the worker, disregard of the rights of others in society). So salvation comes to mean giving each person breathing space, room to choose, to grow and to develop. Oppression is the experience of feeling hemmed in, suffocated, cornered, having to endure exploitation and outrage. This concern for the defenceless in society, this justice of Yahweh, is central to the covenant relationship.

"I will betroth you to me for ever ... in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy" (Hosea 2: 19).

THE CRY OF THE POOR

When the Bible speaks of oppression it does not have in mind a soul in torment or affliction. Oppression refers to a real experience that is directly related to forces or agents of oppression. The oppressed are exploited and someone profits from their dehumanisation:

"(The Egyptians) made the people of Israel serve with rigour and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigour" (Exodus 1: 13-14).

Oppression degrades the poor, forces them to live in a permanent state of anxiety which reaches into the innermost being of the people. This type of oppression moves the God of the Hebrews to hear the cry of the poor:

"I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings" (Exodus 3:7).

Yahweh hears the cry of the people for liberation, and responds. "And now behold the cry of the people of Israel has come to me . . . I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey ..." (Exodus 3:9....8).

In the Old Testament the poor are those who have no social standing and have no power and although ignored by the authorities, they have a strong belief and hope in God. They include the orphan, widow, resident aliens, day labourers, slaves, women and prophets

who denounce oppression. Their liberation must include not only fulfilling their basic needs but giving them the opportunity to live a full life worthy of a human being. This liberation will take place when the poor recover the basic necessities which have been taken from them: the land (Leviticus 25:28), the wages of the day labourer (Jeremiah 22:13), the object, given as a pledge - usually a blanket (Habakkuk 2:6), their dwellings (Job 20:19) and their human dignity.

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY

The Hebrew words used for "the poor" in the Old Testament imply an unequal relationship: one in which a person is placed in an inferior position (Exodus 22:20-28). This unbalanced relationship runs counter to the intentions of Yahweh and must be redressed in a practical way (Psalm 82:2-4). The Year of Jubilee which was celebrated by the Jews every 50 years was a practical programme of planned structural change at social, economic and political levels. The Jubilee Year had as its aim the emancipation of the individual from the shackles of poverty and the elimination of the various economic inequalities in accordance with the demands of social justice. It aimed at resting the land. It restored all confiscated property and it made provisions for the liberation of all Hebrew slaves:

... he shall be released in the year of jubilee, he and his children with him" (Leviticus 25:54-55).

The Jubilee Year emphasised the fact that the earth was only on lease from the Lord. This year was so important that it was seen to be part of the divinely inspired legislation which was revealed on Mount Sinai (Leviticus 25:1).

THE JUST PERSON

The Old Testament writers point out that a person cannot be just before the covenant God unless he or she is prepared to take on the cause of the poor and oppressed (Amos 8:4-8). Biblically there is a link between what we believe and how we act. Justice in the Biblical sense is much more than individual rights or social power; it is about the quality of human relations which should exist in a community. These relationships must be characterised by justice which is linked with other covenant qualities such as steadfast love, mercy and faithfulness.'

The "just" person lives in accordance with the covenant relationship by trusting in the promises of Yahweh and by exercising justice towards his neighbour (Job 4:3-4; Proverbs 29:7; Proverbs 31:9). This is in contrast to the belief that the Jews once held that if a person was well off it was a sign that he or she was a just person with whom God was pleased. Job posed the question of the poor man as the righteous person. He learnt through his own trials and misfortunes that justice meant giving thanks for the good things in life and at the same time being able to recognise that everything in life is a gift, even in the

face of loss and destructiveness.

FOR GROUP WORK

1. Discuss the biblical concepts of salvation, oppression and poverty. 2. Examine some psalms which speak about oppression and the social situation to which these texts refer. (Psalm 146:7; Psalm 99:4; Psalm 98:9; Psalm 73:14; Psalm 72:12.)
3. Reflect on Isaiah 58:6-8.
4. What is the ideal of justice described in Deuteronomy 15:4 and Leviticus 19: 18?
5. From the Old Testament describe the characteristics of "the just man". (Job 4:3-4; Psalm 29:7; Proverbs 31:9; Psalm 15:1-5; Psalm 82:1-8.)

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Identify situations in which people nowadays experience salvation or oppression.
2. Do we genuinely believe that to be a just person means we must take up the cause of the oppressed?
3. Discuss Exodus 22:20ff with reference to today's world.
4. With reference to Job 4:3-4 discuss whether Christians see themselves as stewards or owners of the gifts of creation.

FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

1. Do I see a connection between "knowing the Lord" and doing justice?
2. Am I prepared to suffer as Job did in the face of loss and destructiveness?

PAPER 3

DOING JUSTICE - THE PROPHETIC CALL

The prophets proclaim that oppression is an insult to God. People are called to be stewards of the material gifts of Creation - not owners. As the social consciences of Israel, the prophets continually point out that fidelity to the Law demands not only sacrifice but interpersonal justice, not merely external ritual but the worship of a heart committed to justice.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

The holiness of God is the central theme running through all of Isaiah's prophecy. One facet of this holiness is the passion for justice and righteousness with which Yahweh has dealt with Israel. The leaders of the people (the judges and the kings) have led Israel astray in the Law breaking. But Yahweh never ceases calling the people to repent:

"Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes;
cease to do evil, learn to do good;
seek justice, correct oppression;
defend the fatherless, plead for the widow." (Isaiah 1:16-17)

Isaiah points to the arrival of an ideal new king who will be an agent of renewal for Israel and who will herald the coming of justice and peace (Isaiah 9:6-7).

SUFFERING SERVANT - THE WAY OF NON-VIOLENCE

Four songs' found in the Book of Isaiah describe a servant who is to bring Yahweh's salvation to the Gentiles. These songs point out that the servant brings justice to humankind in a gentle and non-violent way:

"He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice." (Isaiah 42:2-3)

In the Fourth Servant song (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) the life and mission of the servant is described. He is despised and rejected by others and avoided out of distaste and fear (Isaiah 53:3). After his death, however, people became aware of his unselfishness:

"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; ...
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and
with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5).

This type of non-violent action demands a profound faith in a God who will ultimately reward the person who lives out the demands of justice even unto death.

THE POOR AS AGENTS OF GOD'S JUSTICE

The prophet Zephaniah saw dimly a possible role for the poor themselves, as the chosen instruments in God's struggle for justice (Zephaniah 3:11). Jeremiah, who called himself "the needy" showed how God can work through broken and miserable people (Jeremiah 20:13). When they surrender themselves into the hands of God and grow attentive to his word then he will write his Law in their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33) and renew society through their efforts to gain a better life.

KNOWING YAHWEH

The core of Israel's faith, which means "to know God and to praise him who has delivered them", requires the doing of justice (Exodus 20: 1-17). To know Yahweh is to take to heart the cause of the poor and needy. There can be no division between believing and doing. The God of the covenant rejects all worship which excludes the observance of justice. Recognition of sin (which in Hebrew means to miss the mark) is not arrived at just by measuring a deed against a commandment, but by acknowledging that a community relationship has been broken. It is only in their observance of the duties of justice that Christians can be witnesses to God as the liberator of the oppressed.

FOR GROUP WORK

1. Discuss how the prophet Amos analysed the economic, political, cultural and social conditions of his time:
Amos 2:6-7; 3:9-10; 5:7-13; 5:21 -24; 6:4-7; 8:4-8.
2. The four Servant Songs describe the qualities of the person who brings Yahweh's salvation to the Gentiles. What are these qualities? 3. With reference to Isaiah 9:5-7 discuss the qualities of the ideal new king who will bring justice and peace to the nations.
4. What role have the poor themselves in the struggle for justice? Refer to Jeremiah 20: 11 and Zephaniah 3:11 -13.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Discuss Hosea 6:5 in the context of contemporary Christian living. 2. Has Amos a message for the twentieth-century? 3. How can we be prophetic today? 4. Is worship without the observance of justice a lie?

FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

1. Evaluate your life against Isaiah 42: 1-9.
2. "Take your wrong-doing out of my sight. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good, search for justice" (Isaiah 1:16-17).
How is God challenging me now in response to these words?

PAPER 4

GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

THE MISSION OF JESUS

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted" (Isaiah 61 :1). Jesus read these words of Isaiah in the synagogue, and concluded by saying "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:18-21). In Matthew preaching the Good News to the poor is the essential deed of Christ: Jesus sees himself as having a mission of social responsibility; his followers are exhorted to "seek first his (God's) kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

Jesus incorporated the earlier O.T. ideas of salvation into his own person and extended it. The righteousness that Jesus speaks about is something better than ordinary justice. It is the quality which helps a person recognise that there are occasions when the law is deficient because of its generality, and needs relaxation. The fundamental thing about righteousness is that it goes back to God. If God applied to us nothing but the rigid standards of law, where would we be? God is the supreme example of one who is righteous and who deals with others with righteousness. A new world would arise in society if and when people ceased to base their actions on law and legal rights only and asked God to give them the spirit of righteousness.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Synoptic Gospels' present the coming of the kingdom as the central theme of the life of Jesus. The kingdom is the power of God active in the world, transforming it and confronting the powers of darkness. Jesus explains that his power is not given to govern or subdue others but places him "among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). The only form of power which Jesus used was his person, his message and his actions. Ironically his mission had social, even political repercussions. Jesus is the living witness or parable of God's justice. He condenses the precepts of justice in the Old Testament into a new and radical formula: ". . . Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

BELONGING TO THE KINGDOM

Jesus combines a mission of mercy and compassion with a prophetic condemnation of evil and hypocrisy. Worship of God without justice to one's neighbour is condemned as empty and worthless (Matthew 9:13). Jesus warns against the danger of clinging to wealth (Matthew 19:16-30). When material things are made the standard of success the end product is the destruction of society itself. It will be difficult for

the rich to enter heaven (Matthew 19:23). The Lazarus story shows how riches serve to distance the wealthy man from the poor man who ultimately occupies a privileged position in the Kingdom (Luke 16:19-31). The sharing of wealth seems humanly impossible but becomes a reality when salvation comes to a person, such as Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10).

Matthew spells out the impoverished righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, whose outward conformity is not motivated by the disposition of heart and the quality of relationship called for by the Law (Matthew 23:13--36). Followers of Jesus are called to a radical simplicity of life. They are to give away one of two coats; taxcollectors are only to collect what is due and soldiers are to avoid violence, robbery and greed (Luke 6:28; Matthew 5:38--48).

FOR GROUP WORK

1. Discuss some texts from the New Testament which spell out Jesus'

mission of social responsibility.

2. What is the New Testament meaning of "service" in Luke 22:27 and other texts? Is it seen as a power which can transform social and political circumstances?
3. What were the evils and hypocrisy which Jesus condemned? (Matthew 23:1--32).
4. What had Jesus to say about the effects of riches on both the life of the individual and on the community? (Matthew 6:10; 19:21; Matthew 19:16-30; Matthew 26:6--11).

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How can we as Christians bring good news to the poor?
2. How do Christians today see the links between their lives of faith and their social and political involvement?
3. "When material things are made the standard of success, the end product is the destruction of society itself." Is this part of Gospel teaching?

FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

- 1 How am I with people - as one who serves or as one who is served?
2. ". . . If anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles ..." (Matthew 5:40-41). What is being asked of Christians in

PAPER 5

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR JUSTICE

DOING JUSTICE

The Sermon on the Mount is the key to the meaning of justice in the New Testament. The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 6:20-23) describe the right order which God will establish when his reign has its full effect. The poor are the primary recipients of the Good News. Blessedness, now and in the future, is promised to those who are poor in spirit, meek, merciful and peacemakers. In Matthew's account of the Last Judgement (Matthew 25:31-46) Jesus identifies with, and enters into personal solidarity with, the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, the naked and the prisoner. This solidarity means that it is Jesus whom we encounter in the person of the oppressed. The parable warns Christians that they must not only act for justice but they must discover where justice is to be done in their own society.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

In the Acts of the Apostles the liberating power of the Gospel is at work in the early community:

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42).

This listening, fellowship and worship nourished the faith of the believers who "had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45). This fellowship, "koinonia", is not limited to worship and generates concrete practical action in the community. The early Christian community tried to meet the human needs of the community as well as seeing in the Good News the promise of the New Creation. They realised that justice had implications for the social structures operating in any community.

PREFERENTIAL LOVE FOR THE POOR

In his letter James argues that a man's worth cannot be calculated in terms of his earthly possessions but includes everything which makes him rich in the eyes of God (James 4:13; 5:20). The profession of Christian faith is empty without good deeds in favour of the poor:

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction . . ." (James 1:27).

Preferential treatment of the rich, coupled with disregard for the poor, is incompatible with Christianity. James speaks out against wealthy landlords who exploit workers and refuse them the minimum

wage, saying that "the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (James 5:1-6).

FOR GROUP WORK

1. In Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount, who are the recipients of the Kingdom? What are the implications of these statements?
2. In the account of the Last Judgement Jesus identifies with marginalised people. What does his act of solidarity mean?
3. What are the marks of "koinonia" (Christian Fellowship)?
4. What does St. James say about our treatment of the rich and poor? (James 2:1 -9).

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Where should we be doing justice in our society in the light of the demands of the Gospel? What concrete, practical action is needed?
2. What social, political, economic and cultural structures need to be changed if they are to come closer to the reality of the Kingdom?
3. How can we have a Christian community which will be a con temporary sign of "koinonia"?

FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

1. How can personal worship commit a person more to doing justice? 2. What worth have I before God according to St. James' assessment in James 2?

PAPER 6

DOING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

THE PASCHAL MYSTERY

Just as Jesus took the Old Testament conceptions of salvation and placed them within his mission, following his example St. Paul takes the Old Testament concepts of salvation, redemption and liberation and sees their fulfilment in the paschal mystery - the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. For Paul the concept of faith is that of absolute personal trust in Jesus crucified and risen. It corresponds to the concept of conversion found in the Synoptic Gospels. "It is the same justice of God that comes through faith, to everyone, Jew and pagan alike, who believes in Jesus Christ" (Romans 3:22; "Jerusalem Bible" translation),

Faith frees people "... to lead a life worthy of the Lord, ... bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1: 10). Faith is fulfilled in loving service of one's neighbour and gives birth to a new creation. The grace of Christ saves the oppressor from committing injustice and protects the oppressed from enduring it. According to St. Paul the whole of the Christian life is summed up in a service that fulfils the demands of justice. The redemption of Christ has broken down barriers of race, culture and creed and established equality, because "all the members of the body, though many, are one body" (1 Corinthians 12:12).

THE KINGDOM HAS ARRIVED

The New Testament shows that following Jesus, being concerned with injustice, receiving God's own righteousness, imitating the steadfast love of the Father and attaining salvation are different aspects of the same reality. The justice which is to be fully ours as Christians is already partially here. In a paradoxical way Matthew could point out that the kingdom of God which is coming, has already arrived. That is why righteousness in St. Paul's writings can be a gift received now, but also "the crown of righteousness, which the Lord ... will award me on that Day" (2 Timothy 4:8).

This element of not-yetness in the Christian New Testament vision can act as an encouragement to Christians to "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6).

INTER-PERSONAL JUSTICE

The Christian ideal of justice as found in the Old and New Testaments can be summed up as follows: Justice means to do the truth in love.

Christianity, then, embodies a call to service which reaches out to embrace the whole of creation. The Christian is called to bring peace

based on justice, truth, freedom and love. This peace will give "a spiritual tranquility where there is sinfulness, a mental stability where there is anxiety, an emotional security where there is lack of loving, a physical capability where there is illness, a material possibility where there is poverty".

THE POWER OF POWERLESSNESS

The Christian exodus from the slavery of sin as described in the New Testament parallels the exodus from Egypt in the Old Testament. The exodus is continued through another kind of "slavery", a positive slavery of love to one another. The Christian who works for justice will reach back to the centre of faith, to Jesus who is "the expression of God's love: crucified, powerless, dead, defeated and meaningless - yet in the same breath, resurrected, creative, purposeful, resplendent and alive." The Christian road to justice can only be through nonviolence, powerlessness, pain and even death. This is the victory which can overcome any human barrier.

FOR GROUP WORK

- 1 How does St. Paul link faith with good action in his letters?
2. Reword Galatians 3:25-29 in terms relevant to contemporary society.
3. Read Romans 3:21 and 8:39 to examine the relationship between the Christian Exodus from sin and the new commitment of love.
4. What significant Scripture passages spell out the power of powerlessness?

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- 1 Where do you see signs of the kingdom of God?
2. As Christians we are called to reach out "to embrace the whole of creation". What might this mean in terms of a Christian approach to the environment?
3. How important a role does love play in being just?
4. Is there any meaning in experiencing powerlessness and pain for the sake of justice?

FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

1. How can I practice non-violence in my daily life?
2. How do I react when I meet seemingly impossible situations where people endure grave injustice?

* * * *

It has been said that reading the Bible encourages the development of a "world-escaping attitude, not a world-transforming one". Is this true?

FOOTNOTES

1. A. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) p. 5.
2. The term "Yahweh" was the Hebrew name for God, though the Jews thought it too holy for common use. God reveals himself to the children of Israel as Yahweh in Exodus 3:13-14. It seems to be an archaic form of the verb "to be". In semitic thought knowledge of a name gave power over the thing named. It may be that "Yahweh" is used to show how impossible it is to give an adequate definition of God. In Christian thought it brings out the transcendence of a God for whom man can never find a worthy name. The Jerusalem Bible translation uses the term "Yahweh" where most other English translations simply give "The Lord".
3. Steadfast love (Hebrew: hesed): Psalm 118.
Mercy (Hebrew: rahamin): Isaiah 55:7-9.
Faithfulness (Hebrew: suniah): Isaiah 49:14- 16.
4. The four Servant Songs in Isaiah are: (1) Isaiah 42: 1-9; (2) Isaiah 49:1-6; (3) Isaiah 50:4-11; (4) Isaiah 52:13-53:12.
5. The Synoptic Gospels are those assigned to Saints Matthew, Mark and Luke. The authors used a good deal of common source material, which can clearly be seen when passages are viewed side by side. Thus they are called "synoptic" ("with one eye").
6. John Greehy, "The Pattern of History: Let My People Go", *The Clergy Review* Vol. LXV No. 8 (August 1980), p. 274.
7. Brian Wren, *Education for Justice* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1977) p. 178.

USEFUL READING

- "Radical Discipleship", Christopher Sugden (Marshalls).
"Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger", Ronald Sider (Hodder).
"Hoping Against All Hope", Dom Helder Camara (Orbis).
"The Cry of the Poor", Bishop Cahal Daly (Irish Messenger Publications).
"The Call to Conversion", Jim Wallis (Lion).
"Bias To The Poor", Bishop David Shepherd (Hodder Et Stoughton).
"Bible of the Oppressed", Elsa Tamez (Orbis).
"Spirituality of the Beatitudes", Michael H. Crosby OFM Cap (Orbis).
"Taking Sides", Albert Nolan OP (CIIR).
"The Struggle To Be God's People", Ciaran Earley OMI (ICJP).

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT JUSTICE

This study Guide is produced as part of the joint Peace Education Programme of the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace. Already Produced in this series are : "WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT PEACE" (John Knox, 1979) and "WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT VIOLENCE" (Stanley Worrall, 1981). Future titles are planned to include: "What the Bible says about Reconciliation ... Love ... Politics ... Freedom".

Information on these and other joint publications can be obtained from:

The Irish Commission for Justice and Peace,
169 Booterstown Avenue,
Blackrock,
County Dublin.
(phone: 01 885021);

The Irish Council of Churches,
Inter-Church Centre,
48 Elmwood Avenue,
Belfast BT9 6AZ.
(phone: 90 663145).