

Toward a Christian Spirituality of Justice

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To treat of a Christian spirituality of justice is not simply a matter of making an exposition of a doctrine of justice in the Christian tradition. Indeed there is such a teaching on justice in the Judaeo-Christian thought; but a doctrine of justice does not amount to a spirituality of justice. Spirituality, as I shall show, is more than a doctrine.

Justice as Virtue

Let us begin by recalling that justice has been approached traditionally, for the most part of Christian history, as a moral virtue. What has been customary is to speak of the virtue of justice, not of the spirituality of justice. Much of this approach to justice as a moral virtue can be traced to St. Thomas Aquinas' teaching on justice, especially in his *Summa Theologiae*,¹ which has become a standard reference on the topic for centuries.

It is interesting to note that Thomas first treats the theme of justice in his consideration of God's action. God exercises justice when he gives to each one what ought to be given to each according to its nature and condition. "This giving 'what ought to be given' is what God wills for himself and for all his creatures. To do this, whether as rational creature or as God, is to

¹ Thomas' main sources include Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero's *De officiis*. His commentary on the first is another important source of his teaching on justice.

act in accordance with God's justice."² Thus, justice has its origin in God and justice on the part of humans is but a response to, and a reflection of, Gods' justice.

Thomas locates his sustained treatment of justice as a moral virtue in that part of his *Summa Theologiae* dealing with the human being's journey back to God.³ Justice falls within the structure of the moral life, which, as conceived by him, is focused towards the attainment of union with God, human beatitude.⁴ The full discussion of each of the theological and of the four cardinal moral virtues (one of which is justice) follows that of the theme of grace.⁵ This sequence shows that the theological and moral virtues are intimately connected with grace as infused principles of action of the power of grace in the life of believers.⁶

Speaking more of justice, it is that virtue that enables one to render with a constant and perpetual will what is due to the other.⁷ Thomas distinguishes between *general* justice,⁸ that which makes one work for the common good; and *particular* justice,⁹ that which governs the relations between the community and its singular members (*distributive* justice) or the relations between its members (*commutative* justice).¹⁰ Justice then governs one's social relations; it is a social virtue. Among the cardinal moral virtues justice is the only one that is essentially directed to the good of the other¹¹ – one reason why justice towers

² Nicholas Sagovsky, 'Thomas Aquinas on Justice', in John Orme Mills, ed., *Justice, Peace and Dominicans, 1216-2001* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2001) pp. 32-33. ST, I, q. 21, aa. 1-4.

³ ST, II-II.

⁴ ST, I-II, qq. 1-5.

⁵ ST, I-II, qq. 109-113.

⁶ Cf. ST, I-II, q. 110, a. 3.

⁷ ST, II-II, q. 58, a. 1.

⁸ ST, II-II, q. 58, aa. 5-6.

⁹ ST, II-II, q. 58, a. 7.

¹⁰ ST, II-II, q. 61, a. 1.

¹¹ ST, II-II, q. 58, a. 2.

above the rest, "more glorious than either the evening or morning star."¹² Moreover, justice, when informed and motivated by charity, directs a person to his union of love with God and neighbour.

In sum, in Thomas' theology, while justice in itself is a social moral virtue, it is an integral organic part of Christian life. This does not suffice to speak of a spirituality of justice in his theology. Nevertheless, his teaching has inspired many Dominicans and others to take up justice, in different ways, as integral to their commitment as Christians, as evidenced in a book of collection of essays, entitled *Justice, Peace and Dominicans (1216-2001)*.¹³

From Virtue to Spirituality

In recent decades justice and spirituality have both become important themes of Christian life. "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."¹⁴ This most quoted text from the 1971 Synod of Bishops has established the theological foundation for justice being an integral dimension of evangelization and spirituality.

Yet, as Donal Dorr, in his pioneering book, *Spirituality and Justice*, noted, as late as 1984, the link between justice and spirituality has not been easy but "strained." It seemed that many Christians see spirituality and justice to be at odds with each other. This is because proponents of either side have a "reductive" and narrow view of one another's concern. On one hand, those who are committed to social justice are reacting against spirituality. They see spirituality as an individualistic and private practice of the faith. It is not only wanting in social commitment but serves at times as an escape from it. On the other hand, those who are concerned with spirituality find themselves reacting negatively to social justice, seeing it as nothing more than social activism.

¹² ST, II-II, q. 58, a. 12.

¹³ See p. 224 in which the editor makes this point even if the name of Thomas is not mentioned explicitly.

¹⁴ *Justice in the World*, no. 6.

They see its practitioners as lacking in prayer and serenity, as restless or as angry social activists.¹⁵

However, it is interesting to note that in spite of the divide between spirituality and justice, there has been a strong "feeling," a growing consciousness that justice and spirituality, have a deep need for each other. Those who are looking for authentic spirituality faced with the situation of the poor and the oppressed see the necessity of integrating into their spirituality an effective commitment to social justice. Those who have long struggled for justice "feel an urgent need for a nourishment of the spirit that will enable them to continue their work in the face of apathy and opposition."¹⁶

Among the Dominicans, Timothy Radcliffe wrote in 2001: "At a recent meeting in Latin America, the brethren shared their conviction that now one can only struggle for justice if one is sustained by a profound spirituality, walking to Jerusalem without yet glimpsing Easter. If we are to be faithful in the struggle, then we must be contemplative."¹⁷

While there are those who do not see and admit the necessary link between justice and spirituality in the actual living out of their Christian life,¹⁸ there are today many others especially from the third world continents who are not only convinced of it, but also demonstrate in practice a harmonious integration of both in their Christian life. This theme of the emerging synthesis of justice and spirituality has come under the "code" of what is referred to as "spirituality of justice." Indeed, this way of taking of justice is of recent usage.

In some quarters, as in this conference, people tend to use the expression "spirituality of justice and peace" rather than simply

¹⁵ Donal Dorr, *Justice and Spirituality* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1985), p. 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷ Timothy Radcliffe, 'Preface', in John Orme Mills, ed., *Justice, Peace and Dominicans*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁸ Cf. David Weaver-Zercher, 'Introduction', in D. Weaver-Zercher & W. Willimon, eds, *Vital Christianity* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), p. 1.

“spirituality of justice.” The linkage between justice and peace is now taken for granted. *Gaudium et Spes*, nn. 83-87, linked the political issue of peace between nations to the issue of a just international economic order. Peace is founded on justice; justice leads to peace. Justice and peace have become inseparable twin-values and it has been the practice to speak of justice and peace in one and the same breath. To commissions, offices, or groups committed to the work of social justice, the label “of justice and peace” has been appended. Since we focus here on justice, and for brevity’s sake, we shall use the terminology “spirituality of justice” instead of “spirituality of justice and peace.”

Constitutive Dimension of Holistic Spirituality

But in what sense can we speak of a spirituality of justice? What do we mean by a spirituality of justice? It seems to me that we can speak of a spirituality of justice from two perspectives.

First, we can view the synthesis between justice and spirituality from the perspective of a holistic Christian spirituality. It is to be noted that, alongside the growing importance of justice in Christian life, there has been too, in recent decades, a growing interest in the field of Christian spirituality itself. Albert Nolan considers the hunger for spirituality as one of the signs of our times.¹⁹ One healthy result from that interest, which is useful to our purpose, is the rediscovery of a holistic understanding of Christian spirituality.

The word “spirituality” has a long history. But, the meaning that has come down to the 20th century, in which period all of us have been raised, is narrow and dualistic. It is popularly understood as “devotion,” “piety,” “interior life,” “life of the soul,” and “spiritual life.” Spirituality is opposite to the physical or material life of the human person; it only attends to the life and salvation of the soul. It is divorced from temporal, social and political issues. It is almost exclusively expressed through so-called “spiritual practices,” namely, prayer, meditation, contemplation, fasting, silence, penance, etc. It is individualistic and private. Obviously,

¹⁹ Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today, A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (New York: Orbis, 2006), pp. 3-14.

such limited, dualistic, individualistic and private understanding of spirituality does not sit well with social justice.²⁰

Fortunately, there has been a retrieval of the biblical and holistic meaning of spirituality in the Christian tradition. It is derived from Paul's *pneuma* (*ruah* in Hebrew) and *pneumatikos*, translated as *spiritus* and *spiritualitas* in Latin, *spirit* and *spiritual* in English (Gal 5:3, 16-25). For Paul the "pneumatic" or spiritual person is one whose whole being and life is led and ordered by the Holy Spirit.²¹ And such *lived quality of being spiritual* is what we refer to as spirituality. "Spirituality means the quality of a life conducted by the movement of the Holy Spirit."²² It is the lived experience of the human person in his whole being as guided by the Holy Spirit.

Let us underline that spirituality affects the *whole being and life* of the person. This becomes clearer when we consider that in Paul, the spirit and spiritual are not opposed to the *body* and *bodily* (*soma* and *somatikos* in Greek; *corpus* and *corporalis* in Latin), nor to the *matter* and *material*. Paul rather contrasted the spirit and spiritual with the *flesh* and *fleshly* (*sarx* and *sarkikos* in Greek). The *flesh* does not refer to the human body but to the whole human being seen from the perspective as auto-sufficient, closed to the influence of the Holy Spirit; and one who is *fleshly* is "one whose whole being and life are opposed to God's Spirit."²³ In Paul then, it is the *person in his whole being and life* that chooses: either to live "according to the Spirit" or "according to the flesh."

Since it is the entire person that lives "according to the Spirit," and who is spiritual and has spirituality, it follows that spirituality is a holistic lived reality. It involves the physical, emotional and psychical dimensions of one's being; it includes both the person's interior life (evangelical attitudes, values, and motives)

²⁰ Walter Principe, 'Christian Spirituality', in Michael Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, Minnesota: 1993), p. 931.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Jean-Pierre Torrel, *St. Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 2, Spiritual Master*, Robert Royal, trans. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2003), p. 18.

²³ Walter Principe, *op. cit.*, pp. 931-32.

and exterior life (good action, just deeds, loving conduct). Spirituality is both personal and communitarian (ecclesial). It is the whole person in his particular social, economic, political, cultural and religious context that becomes spiritual. Spirituality is a contextual lived Christian life.

Within this holistic framework, commitment to social justice does not only need a spirituality to support and nourish it; there is not a mere juxtaposition of two separate elements. Rather, prayer and action for justice, contemplation and social transformation are all integral dimensions of Christian spirituality. In this synthesis, justice perfectly finds its place as *an integral element of a holistic Christian spirituality*. And conversely, Christian spirituality embraces justice as a *constitutive part* of it.

A New Spirituality

The above synthesis between justice and spirituality is, perhaps, the kind of synthesis that many Christians have arrived at in practice and are comfortable with.²⁴ However, there are others who would look at a spirituality of justice from another level of synthesis. This is the perspective of looking at justice spirituality as *a new spirituality*.

To speak of a spirituality of justice as a new form of Christian spirituality is theologically valid. For Christian spirituality is both *one and many*. It is *one* because all Christian spirituality is essentially one and the same, as we already have seen: "a life according to the Spirit." Such walking or journeying "according to the Spirit" begins with an encounter and call to follow Jesus (cf. Mk 1: 16-20). In that experience one may be deeply "wounded" or overtaken by a particular value or richness of the person, teaching, or mission of Jesus, in relation to one's personal and societal context. That particular value becomes the defining and organizing insight of one's following of Jesus. Thus, out of those varied experiences of individuals or groups of persons different ways of following Jesus have emerged in history. Hence, Christian spirituality is *many* as there are many particular ways of walking

²⁴ It seems to me that this is the perspective that is acceptable to most Christians who are at least responsive to the challenge of justice.

according to the Spirit of Jesus. "The reason for this diversity is that the nucleus around which a spiritual way is built is not exactly the same in every case."²⁵

To illustrate, Dominican spirituality arose initially from the experience of St. Dominic who was captivated by the preaching mission of Christ while the Franciscan spirituality arose from the experience of St. Francis of Assisi who was seduced by the poor Christ. It can be said that Franciscans follow a *spirituality of poverty* and the Dominicans a *spirituality of preaching*. This does not mean that preaching is the only one value of the spirituality of Dominicans, nor poverty of that of Franciscans, to the exclusion of other elements of Christian life. Rather, it means that for Dominicans the preaching of the gospel is the central and organizing value of all the other essential elements of their discipleship, and the poverty of Christ for Franciscans. In other words, a particular Christian spirituality represents a new re-organization of the elements of Christian discipleship around a particular insight or value.

It is in the same sense that one can speak of a *spirituality of justice* as a new and particular form of Christian spirituality. By a *spirituality of justice*, we mean a new re-organization of the elements of Christian discipleship, of walking according to the Spirit of Jesus, around the value of justice. To put it in another way, it is a justice-centred or justice-oriented Christian spirituality.

"Creative" Factors

Certainly no new spirituality comes about in a vacuum. In every case it springs from the midst of particular people faced with concrete life-realities. It is a particular following of Jesus in response to challenges and needs of a historical context. Several factors combined have led to the birth of this new and so-called spirituality of justice.

Why has justice become so important in our recent history? The foremost reason is the historical context that has emerged in the world, beginning mostly after the post-colonial period, parti-

²⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1984), p. 88.

cularly in the third world continents and countries. It is marked by the massive poverty, oppression, marginalization and untold sufferings of masses of peoples. This has awakened a new awareness and response from the people themselves to change their own situation. This has been best described as the "*irruption of the poor*."²⁶ It signifies that the world and the church can no longer ignore the pervasive existence of the poor. And the poor have become so "visible" in a *new way*.

The "poor" are the majority in the world and there are "*new faces*" of the poor. In more recent decades the extension of the word, poor, has gone beyond those who are economically poor. It includes all kinds of victims of oppression, exploitation or marginalization, and ruthless violence. It includes the women who suffer because of gender injustice; religious and ethnic minorities; victims of human trafficking and wars and violent conflicts, especially women and children; migrant workers; refugees of all kinds and mother earth itself.

There is a *new meaning* of poverty. It is not sheer economic destitution alone. Poverty is appalling death; it is premature death for multitudes, unjust death of a culture and a people.²⁷ *Poverty's nature* is understood, too, in a *new way*. Poverty is not an inevitable fate so that nothing can be done to overcome it. It is not a sheer product of backwardness of a civilization and so the remedy would be the model of development of the Western and Northern hemispheres of the world. Rather, *poverty is "structural."* It is primarily a result of structural injustice: unjust structures and policies imposed by the mighty over the weak.²⁸

Above all, what is new is that *the "poor" have come of age*. They have taken upon themselves the *responsibility* to struggle in an organized or concerted way to liberate themselves from injustice.

²⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, 'New Evangelization – A Theological Reflection on the Latin American Church – Santo Domingo', *Sedos* 24 (1992), p. 182.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

²⁸ Cf. Samuel Rayan, 'The Search for an Asian Spirituality of Liberation', in Virginia Fabella et al., eds., *Asian Christian Spirituality* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), pp. 26-28.

What can account for this new consciousness and response of the poor to their miserable lot, of "the irruption of the poor"? The big answer lies in the use of "*critical reflection*," or in the theological language, "*the reading of the signs of the times*." It is a critical reflection on *both the life-realities of the peoples and the sources of their human and religious meaning and faith*. Critical reflection on the reality is mediated by the use of "social analysis." But, this critical reflection does not end with social analysis. The poor and their pastors have re-read the Scriptures, especially the Gospel, seeking for illumination amidst the darkness of their human situations. In particular they have re-interpreted the Exodus story, the Hebrew prophetic tradition, and the story of Jesus (focusing on his mission of preaching the reign of God, the sermon on the mount, the Lord's prayer, and the parables of the kingdom, especially Matthew 25:36, 45, etc), in a new light from their perspective as poor, oppressed or marginalized people. More recently, a gender-sensitive or ecology-sensitive reading of the Scriptures and of the Church tradition has been used in the pursuit of a holistic and liberating interpretation of the faith. Moreover, there are those who have turned to the social teachings of the Church as a resource for their critical-reflection on the social issues they are faced with. Some others have dug deep into their cultural and religious traditions beside that of the Christian one, deriving too from these sources nourishment, hope and courage in their struggle for justice and peace.²⁹

Aided and motivated by the said critical reflection, the poor have formed their own *judgments* and stances in the face of their painful realities. More importantly they have been courageous to *speak and to act together* in order to change and overcome their miserable situations. They have all the reasons to do so. A re-reading of their Christian sources makes them re-discover the liberating power of their faith in God. It tells them that the poor are not meant to be victims of an unjust society. Their misery is alien to the plan of the God of life. God wills that they be liberated from it. They are his people, children of his reign. Theirs is the

²⁹ A good sampling of these different approaches to reading of the signs of the times, in the Asian context, is demonstrated in a collection of contributions from six countries, in Virginia Fabella et als., eds. *Asian Christian Spirituality* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992).

vocation to care and transform the world according to God's reign, his life-giving vision and will for the whole of creation. God is with them and on their side in their cause and struggle for life, justice and peace. God uses and works with them for the realization of his reign in the present world. This whole life of struggle for justice is their own way of walking according to the Spirit of Jesus. They believe and experience that Jesus is always with them (cf. Mt. 28:20). It is a spiritual experience, a spiritual journey for them. It is truly a spirituality of its own kind.

Characteristic Traits

What does this emerging spirituality of justice look like? From the wealth of experiences and writings of both the poor and those committed to the work of justice, we can extrapolate the special traits of a spirituality of justice. In this reflection, we can only paint those traits in broad strokes.³⁰

New Focus. First, it is *focus on the reign of God*.³¹ In this spirituality the reign of God achieves greater prominence more than ever before. The following of Jesus is centred on his mission of proclaiming the reign of God. Accent is placed on the reign of God as present now in this world, not in the future in the world to come. It is both a gift and a responsibility. It is seen as a principle of action towards the transformation of this world, of its social, economic, political, cultural and religious realities, according to God's design. In the Lords' prayer, we pray: "Your kingdom come." The task is how to make this "kingdom" real here and now. Thus, there is a new commitment here: *the praxis of the reign of God*. What are important are not mere desires and ideals based on the vision of the reign but rather concrete actions to make the poor know that indeed the reign of God is in their midst. But, how can it happen that the poor experience this?

New Option. This brings us to the second trait of this spirituality, that is, its *new option*, to wit: the *option for the poor*.

³⁰ Most of the literature is written from the perspective of a spirituality of liberation, e.g., the writings of Gutierrez, Sobrino, Casaldaliga, Vigil. Nonetheless, the commitment to justice is central to the cause of liberation.

³¹ José Maria Vigil, 'Believe as Jesus Did: The Spirituality of the Kingdom', *Sedos* 30 (1998), pp. 122-25.

This is an option for the *real* poor, not the spiritually poor. This option is a free choice to be committed to the poor because God loves them and it is not his will for them to suffer. It is to enter into their world, to be with them, even to become their friends.³² Above all, it means the option for the cause of the poor, not because the poor are good but because the cause of the poor, to overcome poverty and oppression, is the cause of the gospel, the cause of God. "What matters is the uncompromising commitment to the cause of the oppressed as the cause of God."³³ The poor remain though as the primary actors of their cause. Others have much to learn from them, notwithstanding that the poor, like everyone else, have their own faults and weaknesses.

In the end, option for the poor would mean sharing the deprivation, ignominy, helplessness, weaknesses and sufferings of the poor. The divide between the poor and those who work with them would no longer exist. This would be the result of standing together on the same side against oppression. Thus, at its finest stage, option for the poor means *solidarity with the poor* in their life and struggle for God's cause of justice. It is a new way of experiencing God in our day. It is a spiritual experience of solidarity with God in Jesus Christ.³⁴

New Values. But, on what values does our option for the poor stand? Generally speaking, it stands on the values of God's reign. And there are several of them as can be gleaned from the parables of the reign in the gospels. One or two of these values can assume greater importance than others depending upon the historical moment. In the face of our context today, *passion for justice* shines as the most relevant value of God's reign to advance the commitment of option for the poor. In the face of structural injustice, justice stands as the best response of those who are on the side of God's reign. Thus, the *central ethical value* of the spirituality at hand is *justice*.

Here justice is more than a private virtue of interior moral rectitude that renders an individual just in the eyes of God. The

³² Cf. Gustavo Gutierrez, 'Preferential Option for the Poor', *Sedos* 24 (1992), p. 180.

³³ Albert Nolan, 'Option for the Poor', *Poverty Watch* 9 (1990), p. 6.

³⁴ Cf. Albert Nolan, 'Spiritual Growth and the Option for the Poor', *Toward a Spirituality of Justice* (Chicago, IL.: 8th Day Center for Justice, 2000), p. 18.

Bible uses different words for justice but it basically means right relationships with God, neighbour, oneself, and the whole creation, in response to the gift and task of justice.³⁵ It is an all-embracing attitude that seeks to set right anything that is unjust: ways of acting and possessing goods, modes of relating and of living with all kind of "others." This includes the passion to set right public policies, structures, institutions and societies according to God's design. In short, it is a whole way of life – quite a definition of a spirituality. Luke presents Jesus himself as justice incarnate. "Truly this man was just," as the centurion proclaimed (Lk 23:47).

If the practice of justice were to be effective it needs to be complemented by other values of the reign. Paul gives us what is regarded by some as the only definition of the reign of God: "the kingdom of God is a matter of justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). There is a tendency to interpret these three values of the reign as purely private interior spiritual blessings. But, these three also mean principles of action of what it means to be Christians here and now.³⁶ Thus, for Paul, with justice comes peace and joy in living out God's reign. Justice peace and joy are perfect companions (Rom 14:17; cf. Gal 5:22).

Peace, beyond its meaning as interior tranquillity, is "peace on earth" among social groups. It does not only mean absence of war or conflicts; positively, it means tranquillity of order among individual persons, communities and peoples. There is a reciprocal relationship between justice and peace. On one side, peace is viewed as a fruit of justice. After all, peace is tranquil order or general well-being as a result of justice. On the other side, peace in turn tempers the practice of justice; it mellows down the practitioners of justice, restraining them from resorting to violence or violent ways. Justice and peace are "mutual friends." They foster each other's existence and growth. Justice workers are at the same time called to be peacemakers! The relationship between justice and peace is intimate. "Justice and peace shall kiss" (Ps 85:11).

³⁵ Cf. Barbara E. Reid, 'Preaching Biblical Justice', in Michael Monshau, ed., *The Grace and Task of Preaching* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2006), pp. 329-49.

³⁶ B. T. Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988), p. 18.

Joy is an unmistakable value of the reign of God. There is joy in finding the "precious pearl," the hidden treasure"; there is joy in retrieving the "lost sheep," the "lost coin." There is joy in the return of the "lost son." There is joy upon hearing the word of God (Lk 8:13). In other words, there is joy in the presence, experience, reception of a gift of the reign. There is joy, too, in working for the reign. The seventy-two disciples returned with joy after their first missionary expedition (Lk 10:17). Jesus rejoiced that the mysteries of the reign are revealed to the "child-like" (Lk 10:21).

Joy must be a mark of workers of the kingdom. This is true of those who struggle for justice and peace. It is a paradox but there can be joy in the midst of persecution for the sake of justice (Mt 5: 10). In the face of hatred, exclusion, insult and denunciation, Jesus assures his disciples, "Rejoice and leap for joy on that day!" Prophets are always treated in the same way (Lk 6:23).

In other words, the joy that comes with the long and difficult haul for justice and peace is a paschal joy. The opposite of joy is not pain but sadness. It looks impossible but there is joy in pain suffered for the love of the life of others. It is like the joy of a mother that forgets the pain at the birth of a child (Jn 16:21). Here lies the deepest meaning of the joy of God's reign that comes with justice and peace. A spirituality of justice and peace cannot but be also a spirituality of joy. But, how could this be possible?

Deep Mysticism. A prophetic life of justice, peace and joy is not possible without God's grace. Jesus' praxis of the reign was derived from and is propelled by his profound relationship with God. He spoke of him as his "loving parent." He called him: "Abba," a fond address signifying deep *intimacy*.³⁷ And Jesus nurtured his relationship with the Father by constant communion with him. He always found time to be with him, in prayer, silence or solitude (Mk 1:35; 6:46; Lk 4:42; 5:16; 6:12). Without doubt he was a pray-er, a contemplative. If his words and deeds revealed God's reign it was because of his deep experience, intimate love-life with his *Abba*. He was a prophet because he was also a mystic. His prophecy bespeaks his mysticism.

³⁷ Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today, A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (New York: Orbis, 2006), pp. 70-71.

In this light, we see that commitment to justice is rooted in one's intimate love relationship with God. It has its source in one's experience of God, of Jesus' *Abba*. It presupposes and needs to be sustained by a deep prayer life. Prayer is part of the praxis of the reign. Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the coming of the *Abba's* reign (Lk 11:2) and for his will to be done "on earth" (Mt 6:10).

Contemplation though, as enriched by commitment to justice, has a different focus. It is not turned to the self and "inside." Rather it directs more its gaze to the outside, to the other. It is a vision of God who is deeply involved with his creation and history, "inseparable from the world and from human beings".³⁸ Thus, it is a vision, too, of the neighbour, the beauty of his human dignity, inclusive of his concrete needs.³⁹ It is a contemplation of the real case of the poor today and of our Christian response to it. Hence, mysticism of this kind cannot but bear fruits of compassion and justice for the world.

Lived Community. The work of justice remains ever an immense challenge for one person to handle. Structural injustice affects communities and societies and the world at large. Thus, it needs the commitment and efforts of all to bring about an alternative order of things, a just or "another" world. It is a communitarian task. And at least, it should begin with groups or communities, regardless of their size. It is a happy thing that the works for justice and peace in most cases have been begun or are being advanced by organized groups or communities, civic and religious ones.

Within the ecclesial context, the cause for justice, peace and care for the environment has emerged mostly from small Christian communities of various models, particularly from the so-called basic ecclesial communities of Latin America. In Asia, these communities are referred to as basic Christian communities. Needless to say the experience of community in these models is more true and real than in the larger setting of parishes. In

³⁸ Yves Congar, as quoted by Paul Murray, *The Preacher at Prayer* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2003), p. 16.

³⁹ Cf. Paul Murray, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-30.

these there is an experience of a lived community. And this is the "setting" that has given birth and sustained the commitment to justice for decades. This fits perfectly well with the strategy of Jesus. "He gathered people together in family-like communities as seeds of the emerging kingdom."⁴⁰ A lived experience of community is essential to the cause of struggling for justice. This is true in spite of the fact that prophets of justice are usually rejected by their own communities; they become isolated and are thrown down deep into solitude. But committed to justice as God's cause, instead of being driven to desperate loneliness, they discover in the midst of solitude a deeper meaning of community.⁴¹

A community's journey on the road that leads to justice takes a long way and time and that it can look like an "unending road." It passes through the long "dark night of injustice." At times, it happens that a whole community is suspected as subversive, persecuted and marginalized by the mighty allies of injustice. In this instance, "the support of the community is essential for the crossing of the desert. So true is this that only in community can one travel this road."⁴²

Finally, community is the place to celebrate the presence and small gains of the reign in the present while working in hope for its consummation in the future. Above all, it is the place to celebrate with gratitude the Lord's death-resurrection in the Eucharist – food for strength and courage on the uncharted road of justice. In sum, a lived community is indispensable on the long and perilous road of justice. But, where does the road end?

Freedom of the Spirit. It seems that justice is all that matters. But, the truth is, justice is not the goal of the journey. Not even liberation. "Liberation is not our end; it is a process, it is a people's journey, not the destination."⁴³ Certainly, justice is crucial as it liberates people from injustice, oppression, margi-

⁴⁰ Albert Nolan, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

⁴¹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, p. 131.

⁴² All the quotes in this paragraph are from Gustavo Gutierrez, *ibid.*, pp. 129-33.

⁴³ Gustavo Gutierrez, 'Epilogue', Pedro Casaldaliga and Jose Maria Vigil, *Liberating Spirituality* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1996), p. 215.

nalization, poverty and from any other reality that destroys life and creation. It is not liberation of one social group, the poor, from another, the rich. Liberation is for all. However beyond liberating all from any and every anti-reign realities, a greater value is aimed at.

Spirituality is a life led by the Holy Spirit. "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17). The greater stake then in spirituality is the *freedom of the Spirit*.⁴⁴ Albert Nolan describes Jesus' spirituality as a spirituality of radical freedom.⁴⁵ It is the kind of freedom that is meant for all and accessible to all. It is both freedom *from* and freedom *for*. Jesus, upon the Spirit's descent on him at his baptism (Mk 1:10), experienced this freedom. He braved the desert to face his temptation and then plunged into his mission of proclaiming the reign of God with freedom. He did the *Abba's* will in word and deed regardless of what others thought or said. He was fearless and feared nobody, even those who were after his life. He was completely free to relate, reach out, and love all those he met, particularly the poor, the nobodies and outcasts of his time. To the point of death, he was free to give his life for others. "No one takes it (my life) from me, but I lay it down on my own" (Jn 10:18). "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46).

This is the same freedom of Jesus that people who are committed to justice discover, or learn from experience, gradually or finally. Paul, in Galatians, delineates what this freedom of the Spirit is for: "serve one another through love" (Gal 5:13). It is freedom to serve; it is *freedom to love*.

Working for justice is a way to discover this freedom to love. What is first discovered is the freedom to love God. It is freedom to love the true God, not the idols of money, power, or prestige. It is freedom to love the true face of God, the *Abba* who loves his people and the whole creation, not the false images of God. Second, it is freedom to love all, inclusive of the "poor" and the "enemies," outsiders. In sum, it is freedom to love God

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.* and in *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, pp. 91-92.

⁴⁵ See *Jesus Today, A Spirituality of Radical Freedom*, pp. 180-81.

and neighbour, not one's ego, to the point of sacrifice, danger of or death itself.

In this freedom to love, as Jesus assures his disciples, "fear is useless." Justice workers have learned, the hard way from experience, not to be afraid because the Father is faithful to those who put their faith in him; he is worthy of complete trust. They have seen, passing through the "dark nights," how gratuitous the Father's love for them and the poor is. In the words of the Beloved Disciple: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear" (1 Jn 4:18). If they can love God and others gratuitously, it is because God has first loved them gratuitously.⁴⁶

Only a Snapshot

We have seen here how the shift from talking of justice as virtue to spirituality has evolved. We have also presented the two perspectives of speaking of a spirituality of justice. Then we have zeroed our attention on one perspective: justice as a new form of Christian spirituality. After, looking at the dynamic factors that have led to its emergence, we have identified its characteristic traits, as if by weaving together certain central spiritual intuitions or insights. I hope that we have succeeded in weaving a coherent synthesis of a new spirituality.

There is no pretence here of arriving at a definitive picture of the spirituality of justice. This is but *one* and *tentative* profile of it. For that reason, this reflection is entitled "Toward a Christian Spirituality of Justice," with emphasis on the words, *toward* and *a*. Borrowing the image of Gustavo Gutierrez, we are here looking at a spirituality that is more like a newly born child whose features are not yet well defined, but still, it would be better to photograph the baby now. Later, we will see what the child will look like and whom does he/she resemble.⁴⁷ Thus, we have dared here to take a "snapshot" of the baby. I hope that the photo would inspire each one of us to sketch a profile of our own personal spirituality of justice. □

⁴⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez considers gratuitous love as the "atmosphere" that makes the work for justice efficacious. See *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, pp. 107-113.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.