

Bishops of Ireland on Development

Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of Ireland on the establishment of Trócaire, the Irish Catholic Agency for World Development

Dear Christian people of Ireland,

1. The nations of the world can be divided into two classes: first, the developed nations, second, the developing nations.
2. Every year the gap between the two grows deeper and wider. The developed countries are the rich countries and the developing countries are the poor ones; the rich grow richer by leaps and bounds while the poor lag farther and farther behind.
3. There is no difficulty about deciding which of these two groups our own country belongs to. Officially and in reality, Ireland is a developed country. We are numbered among the rich, not the poor; among the haves, not the have-nots. It is true that there are countries that are considerably richer than we are. It is true that there are inequalities within our own society and we must never forget that some of our people are living in poverty. But our problems are small indeed when we compare them with the problems of the developing countries or, as they are sometimes called, the Third World.
4. There are many countries in the Third World today where the majority of the people go to bed hungry every night, where the majority have never learned to read or write, where a baby born today can expect to die twenty years earlier than an Irish baby. The average income in the developed countries, amongst which we are included, is increasing by more than £30 a year; in the developing countries it is increasing by less than £2 a year.
5. We are a rich nation, then, while others are poor. But there is more to it than that. We are a rich nation to some extent *because* others are poor. Part of our prosperity is due to the fact that people in the developing countries are not getting a fair deal.

Aid Programmes

6. It is true that the rich nations give aid to the poorer ones. However, when we examine this aid closely, we find it is by no means as impressive as it seems at first.
7. Some of this aid is straightforward commercial investment, money which is put into business enterprises in the Third World for the purpose of making a profit. Some of the aid is in the form of government loans which have to be repaid at substantial rates of interest. Some of the aid, finally, is in the form of a direct gift, but even in this case there are often conditions about the way it is to be used, which lessen its effect. The result of all this is that only a fraction of the aid given to the Third World is aid in the fullest sense of the word, without interest or repayments or conditions.
8. Aware of the shortcomings of much so called aid the United Nations has set an annual target for Official Development Assistance. This target amounts to seven-tenths of one percent of the gross national product of each developed country. In other words each country should be giving seven pounds out of every one thousand pounds of its annual income. Official Development Assistance actually being given by developed countries is barely half the target set by the United Nations. Ireland's Official Development Assistance does not even reach seventy pence out of every thousand pounds.
9. In the meantime, while Western nations are giving aid with one hand, they are putting up trade barriers with the other which hinder the flow of goods from the countries of the Third World. These poorer countries, in order to improve their condition, need a market for their raw materials and their manufactured goods. However, European nations among others, put restrictions on the import of many such products. They do this primarily to protect their own producers and manufacturers, but the secondary effect is to close one more door in the faces of the people of the Third World. We may not like to acknowledge that our actions may have such adverse consequences for other people but as Christians we must face up to these facts.

Teaching of Christ

10. We in Ireland who are followers of Jesus Christ must continually try to shape our lives by his teaching. He taught us to love one another, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to care for the sick. He said: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt 25:40).
11. We know that we cannot claim to love God if we do not love our fellow men. St. John tells us "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3: 17-18).

12. We in Ireland must never close our eyes or our hearts to the needs of the Third World. We have been prompt in the past to come to the aid of peoples suffering from exceptional hardships, as in the case of the special appeals which were made at times of serious disasters. We are proud and rightly proud of our missionaries, lay and religious and of their many helpers at home, who have done so much to satisfy the material and spiritual needs of our less fortunate brothers and sisters in poorer nations. We pay tribute to the work and witness of other Christian Churches in this field and to the endeavours of voluntary organisations such as Gorta.
13. But the duty of helping these nations does not fall only on individuals and organisations; it is a duty which falls on the richer nations themselves and on their governments.
14. The earth and its good things belong to all the people of the earth and no nation has the right to build its own prosperity upon the misery of others. It is our Christian duty as individuals to share our wealth and to help our needy brothers. It is equally our Christian duty to demand that the political authorities representing us act always with justice and responsibility towards less fortunate countries and be prepared to use all means necessary for this end.
15. We have recently joined the European Economic Community. Our standard of living, already high, is expected to rise still higher. Instead of merely earning six times as much as the average worker in the Third World, we may earn perhaps twelve or fifteen times as much. There are two ways in which we can respond to this new prosperity. One way is to seize on it eagerly as something which is ours by right and to look forward to a life of growing luxury and leisure. The other way is to look on it as a gift from God to which we have no more right in justice than our brothers in Asia or Africa or South America. For Christians, this second way is the only way. As members of the world's most powerful trading group, we will have an opportunity of helping the needy nations in a manner and on a scale never within our power before. It is our duty to see that our public representatives influence this great body in the right direction.
16. As individuals and as a nation we remember with pain that due to underdevelopment nearly half the population of the world still do not get enough to eat, that present increases in food production are scarcely able to keep pace with increases in population, that millions of people die of hunger every year. It is not a time for complacency, for self-congratulation. It is a time for action.
- Trócaire**
17. For this reason, the Bishops of Ireland have set up a fund which is called **Trócaire**, the Irish word for "mercy". It will provide an official channel through which Irish Catholics, like Catholics in other developed countries, can express their commitment on an ongoing basis, to the needs of the Third World. This will be a further contribution to the overall effort in favour of the developing countries. Far from wishing to act in isolation, **Trócaire** will seek to work in close harmony with other Churches and with those organisations which are working for the development of peoples.
18. The aim of **Trócaire** will be two-fold. Abroad, it will give whatever help lies within its resources to the areas of greatest need among the developing countries. At home, it will try to make us all more aware of the needs of these countries and of our duties towards them. These duties are no longer a matter of charity but of simple justice.
19. A collection to launch this fund is being held in all churches in Ireland next Sunday with the aim of helping the people in the developing countries to help themselves. It is particularly appropriate that our commitment to sharing with those in need throughout the world should be expressed during the period of Lent. Our response to this collection will be one very positive way of showing to ourselves, to our political representatives, and to the nations of the world, that we are at one with Our Lord and Teacher Jesus Christ in his compassion for the needy and in his will to help them.
20. We pray the all-merciful God to grant us all a share in his mercy. We pray him to keep our hearts always open to those in hunger and in need. We pray above all that he will never let us grow accustomed to the injustice and inequality that exist in this world or grow weary in the work of setting it right.

On behalf of the Hierarchy of Ireland

✠ **William Cardinal Conway, Archbishop of Armagh**

✠ **Dermot Ryan, Archbishop of Dublin**

✠ **Joseph Cunnane, Archbishop of Tuam**

✠ **Thomas Morris, Archbishop of Cashel**

**Feast of the Presentation of the Lord
2 February 1973**