

STRUCTURES FOR WORLD JUSTICE*

by Miss Barbara Ward

Nearly ten years have passed, she said, since the issue of world justice was first raised in the Second Vatican Council. Five years have passed since the Holy Father issued his great Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. During these years, the basic facts of world wealth and world poverty have not changed. At least seventy-five per cent of the world's resources are controlled and consumed by the third of humanity who have crossed the threshold to the modern technological community. And the great majority of the world's Christians live in these wealthy lands. This was the starting point for the Council's concern. This was the underlying fact of fundamental maldistribution of the world's resources against which Pope Paul raised his powerful protest.

INJUSTICE WORSENS

Today, however, we not only have to confirm the continuance of this injustice. We must take note of the reasons why it is in fact growing worse. In the first place, a number of the wealthiest nations appear steadily less committed, less concerned and less inventive in their approach to world development. Over the last three months, we have seen the developed world's financial leaders discuss the future of the whole regime of international trade with barely a mention of the two-thirds of humanity in developing lands who depend upon it for any hope of further advance. In America, aid has actually been cut and new obstacles place in the way of exports from developing lands. Meanwhile, in the general uncertainty, the prices of many of the imports poor lands have to buy has gone up and relative business stagnation depresses their exports. We can hope that the developed powers do not allow their differences to degenerate into a trade war. We have almost no grounds for hope that the needs of developing lands will play much part in the resolution of the differences. Even the most rational method so far discussed of increasing their working capital — the assignment to them of all new issues of special drawing rights — seems to have sunk without trace.

The second reason for the worsening of the world situation in relation to basic justice is the increasing realization that development in the full social, cultural and economic sense is much more difficult to achieve in the latter part of the twentieth century than it ever was when the

* This address was delivered at the 21st Congregation of the Synod on Oct. 20, 1971.

developed nations modernized their societies a hundred and more years ago. I will only point out the main lines of difference. Population growth is twice as great as in the nineteenth century. This means double the annual growth in a nation's labour force. Until recently, agricultural expansion was barely keeping pace and now, with the new highly productive **Green Revolution** of hybrid grains, fertilizers and water supplies, there is an increasing risk that, without drastic land reform, a small elite may introduce mechanization, drive the labourers and tenant farmers from the land and absorb most of the surplus. But if more landless men join the already vast migrations to the cities — which grow twice as fast as population — we confront a new obstruction. Much of modern industry, most of it introduced from abroad and in many cases still under the domination of foreign ownership and control, tends today to require more capital — which developing lands lack and need less labour — which they have in abundance. So unemployment rises and in many developing cities is already equal to a quarter of the labour force. And industrial unemployment is aggravated by one further obstruction — the obstacles placed by developed countries in the way of manufactured exports from developing lands.

RICH ARE GETTING RICHER

Few, if any, of these conditions prevailed a hundred years ago. Even so, modernization was tragic and disruptive enough. It is nothing to the traumas of obstructed development that lie ahead — unless there is world action and world justice, with local effort and local justice, to offset the deadlocks.

But there is a third reason for concern. It is new. It is still difficult to estimate. But it bears directly upon the issue of the distribution of the world's resources. I repeat. At least three quarters of the world's supplies are consumed by the already rich. Their demand for energy, for instance, is increasing steadily — by at least three per cent a year. Much of our energy from a finite source — the fossils fuels of oil and coal and gas — and we are going through some of it, notably oil, at a pace that may lead to complete depletion early next century. Even where supplies are more adequate, the rich nations have already used up some of the cheapest and most easily available resources. They have thus added to the costs of development for the late-comers.

And this concern about the use of resources is part of a wider problem. High consumption means high wastes. All too often the effluents from the high consumer economy is not only polluting the rich nations' own streams and airsheds. It is slopping out into the oceans and, apparently, raising the temperature of the entire planet. If these results follow from

the high standards of only a quarter of humanity, what might not happen to planet earth if three-quarters sought the same levels of income? We cannot disconnect our economic activities from the air systems and the oceans and waters upon which all life ultimately depends. Overloading the biosphere is now a recognizable risk. Do the rich then say to the poor: "Bad luck. While we keep our standards, you must hold down yours in the interests of human survival"? Once again, the ultimate issue of distributive justice stares us in the face.

What part can we play as Christians in face of this deepening crisis? Above all, how can this Synod, speaking with its immense authority to all the People of God, express our commitment to the cause to which we are directly called as faithful followers of the Son of Man?

FOUR POINTS TO PONDER

This response will be the fruit of your deliberations, venerable Bishops. But may we hope that they will include four points?

The first is to set in motion an on going process of education of all Catholics in the facts of world justice and planetary inter-dependence. From school book to sermon, from primary school to seminary, all must hear the word.

The second is to call on all Catholic citizens in developed lands to join with their fellow Christians — and with all men of faith — to demand a permanent commitment by governments to the large transfers of resources and the lasting openings for trade without which development will not succeed.

The third is to urge upon all Catholic citizens — in developed as in developing countries — the need for a thorough going reconsideration of their own social structures and personal living standards. Many of us profit only too lavishly by patterns of ownership and income which make us the elite of the earth. Challenge us to personal sacrifice, to a modesty of living more in keeping with the demands of local and international justice.

Last of all, may we plead that the Church itself, this foreshadowing of a universal and planetary order, conduct its own affairs in the strict spirit of justice and poverty. I believe many people in our troubled world today are looking for a sign that there is meaning in life and some sense and purpose to man's planetary adventure. Teach us, therefore, by word and example to love and respect this small planet which must call all humanity, teach us to moderate our demands, share our resources and seek with all our brothers to make a reality of our prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come".