



THE CHURCH IN MALTA

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
Archdiocese of Malta

16th November 2017
96/2017

CALLED TO WORK FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

DOCUMENT BY THE JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSION ONE MONTH FROM THE MURDER OF DAPHNE CARUANA GALIZIA

One month ago today, journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia was assassinated in a premeditated attack on our society.

The reactions to Daphne Caruana Galizia's murder, which ranged from impassioned calls for justice to complete, almost callous, indifference, highlight the polarisation that exists within our community, which remains deeply divided along the fault-lines of partisan political allegiance.

In the words of Archbishop Charles J. Scicluna: "We are witnessing an exacerbation of political dialogue or perhaps a lack of dialogue, that worries external observers and those who are committed to the advancement of dialogue and the common good."¹

One month on, we are left with a sense that our society is not at peace, either with or within itself, as we struggle to come to terms with the enormity of what happened and to understand its implications for us, as individuals and as a community.

This document is an invitation to reflect on where our society stands at this significant moment in our history and to understand better how we can work together to promote peace.

Peace: a gift and a task

While it is no doubt necessary to pray and ask God for the gift of his peace, it is clear that this is nowhere near enough. Peace is hard work and, if we want to live in peace, each and every one of us must commit to work for it. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, in his Message for the 2007 World Day of Peace, "Peace is both gift and task ... peace between individuals and peoples –

¹ CHARLES J. SCICLUNA, *Interview*, <https://agensir.it/europa/2017/10/26/rethinking-europe-mons-scicluna-bridges-not-walls-reception-is-in-the-dna-of-our-continent/>, last accessed 15 November 2017.

the ability to live together and to build relationships of justice and solidarity – calls for unfailing commitment on our part.”²

The social teachings of the Church remind us that peace is founded on truth, justice, freedom and love. These four foundational values are interdependent, and each is essential; a community cannot be truly at peace if one of them is missing or disregarded.

Truth: the foundation of peace

If we want to live in peace, we must uphold truth in our own lives and to commit to seeking the truth, about ourselves and the society in which we live, which is “a matter of no small account today, in a social and cultural context which relativizes truth, often paying little heed to it and showing increasing reluctance to acknowledge its existence.”³ The search for the truth requires us to look beyond what is immediately apparent, and to seek information from sources other than just the political party we support, or the posts and opinions shared by like-minded ‘friends’ on social media.

We need to be willing to dialogue in a spirit of mutual respect, which implies a readiness to listen to each other and to question our own deeply-held assumptions about ourselves, about each other and about our society. We also need to acknowledge our role in creating and perpetuating the current dynamic of division and polarisation.

Only then can we move beyond ‘my’ truth, which in Malta is all too often coloured by political allegiance, to a shared and fuller understanding of who we are. An understanding that encompasses not only an appreciation of the positive aspects of our society, but also of the less savoury aspects of who we are as individuals and as a community – of the sin we need to eradicate if we are to journey towards healing, wholeness and peace.

Justice: our compass on the path to peace

In the days following the murder, many urged the government to ensure that justice is done. While it is essential to ensure that whoever committed this heinous crime is brought to justice, we need to do far more than this to ensure that we live in a just society.

A just society is not one that is lost in legalistic jargon, intent on following the letter of the law whilst breaking its spirit. It is one where the rule of law is guaranteed, where rights and obligations

² POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the XL World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2007, 2.

³ IDEM, *CARITAS IN VERITATE*, 2.

are respected not just by the State but by each and every individual, and where **all** are truly equal before the law.

While it is tempting to think that upholding justice is the government's business, it is important to remember that upholding justice is also a personal duty. The prophet Micah reminds us that what God requires of us is, "To act justly and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God."⁴

This demands that we recognise our civic duties towards others and towards our community. That we stand against a culture of corruption, cronyism and nepotism in our own dealings with authorities, by not seeking favours or offering gifts. That we treat each person with respect, refuse to put personal profit before the common good, and are ready to contribute to the community of which we are a part. That we shoulder our responsibilities without fear or favour.

This said, it is clear that the State has a clear responsibility and a key role in ensuring that justice is done and that the rights of all, regardless of any personal characteristics, are respected. It is the State that needs to ensure that no one should need to rely on a system built on patronage and personal connections to enjoy what is theirs by right.

In the ultimate analysis, the litmus test of our commitment to justice is surely how the marginalised and vulnerable, those who have no vote and voice, are treated. And, the only way to guarantee justice for all, especially the most vulnerable, is to ensure that we have strong, adequately resourced and independent institutions, allowed to function in full respect for the rule of law.

Love: the spirit that animates everything we do

The call to love is central to the Catholic faith. In the Gospel of John we read the words of Jesus, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another."⁵ And the standard Jesus sets is high – we are called to love one another as he loved us, even our enemies and those who persecute us.⁶

This love is not just a vague feeling of empathy – it implies a firm and concrete commitment to solidarity. This means we need to live and work not only for ourselves, but to respond to the needs of others as we would to our own⁷, and to "take effective steps to secure" the good of the other.

It is a love that requires us not just to alleviate individual suffering, but also to work on the social, political and economic levels to promote the common good. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that:

⁴ Micah 6:8

⁵ JN 13:34.

⁶ MT 5:44.

⁷ POPE JOHN XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, 35.

“To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity.... The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them.... This is the institutional path – we might also call it the political path – of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbour directly.”⁸

Freedom: the power to think, act, and speak without fear, in full responsibility

Freedom, as understood in the Catholic tradition, is not simply the ability to do and say what I like whenever I like, or that I live free from fear and want – although these are no doubt essential elements of human dignity. It is also freedom ‘for’ – for the purpose of seeking what is true and loving, for the purpose of working for justice and for the common good, ultimately for the purpose of seeking God. This encompasses the freedom to engage actively, in the secular world, to build the “universal city of God”.

As with all of the other values, this requires both an individual commitment to exercise one’s freedom responsibly – in full respect for the rights, freedoms and dignity of the other – and a commitment from the State, which retains ultimate responsibility to ensure that our society is truly free. A State does this by upholding the right of all, even those it does not agree with, to speak out, to criticise and to engage socially and politically. Not only, it should also create strong and independent institutions, equipped to guarantee the defence of individual freedoms.

Called to change the world

Thinking back on all that has happened in the past month, it is clear that we have much to do if we want to live in peace with ourselves and with each other. This document is intended to spur and act as a tool for personal and communal reflection on what we are called to do, as individuals and as a community, at this time.

We believe that there is a deep need for acknowledgment of, and repentance for, our own personal responsibility of each one, for the current state of our society. We also need to pray, together with Pope Francis and ask “God to give us more politicians capable of sincere and effective dialogue aimed at healing the deepest roots – and not simply the appearances – of the evils in our world!”⁹

However, it is also essential for us to engage in concrete action to bring change. Our faith is, in itself, a call to action, a call to work to bring about the kingdom of God first in people’s hearts, but

⁸ POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 7.

⁹ POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium*, 205.

also in the world. Indeed, Pope Francis has said that the desire to bring this change is, in some way, the criterion of the authenticity of our faith. In his words, “An authentic faith always involves a profound desire to change the world”¹⁰.

Of course we can “change the world” by assisting individuals and by providing services and support. This has always been, and will remain, a central and important part of the work of the Church in Malta – a concrete testimony of our commitment to social justice and our concern for the poor, vulnerable and marginalised.

However, as Catholics, we are called to go a step further. We are called to bring change, by working for the common good through “that complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically and culturally”.¹¹ Contrary to what we might like to believe, this is not a task entrusted to some, but a universal duty: “**Every Christian** is called to practise this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields in the *pólis*”.¹²

This implies a real need to reflect on the social, political and economic reality of our country in the light of the gospel, and to actively engage in discussion, dialogue and action on these issues. In a democratic society, politics plays a central role in securing peace and ensuring justice, so it is hopelessly facile to imagine that we can work for the common good without engaging in a meaningful way even at this level.

In the words of David Stevens of the Corrymeela Community, which works for peace in Northern Ireland:

“The key tasks in politics are to promote justice and peace, and to protect the vulnerable. Therefore, we cannot remain indifferent to politics and we must make moral judgements about politics ... Of course we cannot reduce political contests to a struggle between the forces of righteousness and the forces of evil. However, relative and prudential judgements can and must be made. And we make moral judgements in the awareness of the persistence of sin”.¹³

Of course, in a society as politically polarised as ours, there is always the risk – not to say the certainty – that anything we say, no matter how balanced, will be perceived as partisan or manipulated to serve partisan interests; that the messengers will be demonised and their credibility undermined on account of their real or perceived political allegiances. Yet this cannot, and should not, be an excuse for us to renounce to our obligation to speak truth to politics and to work unceasingly for the common good.

¹⁰ IDEM, *Homily*, Liturgical Memorial of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, 3 January 2014.

¹¹ POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 7.

¹² IBID.

¹³ DAVID STEVENS, *The place called reconciliation: Texts to explore*, Corrymeela Press, 2008, 12.

As Pope Francis reminds us, “responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.”¹⁴

An invitation to action, in hope

Because we live in a world marked by “the persistence of sin”, where the forces of evil often seem to take the upper hand in our own lives and in the world, it is easy to be discouraged, to feel that our efforts are futile and hopeless.

But, buoyed by Jesus’ assurance that he has already overcome sin and conquered the world¹⁵ and his promise that if we ‘go’ he will be with us,¹⁶ as well as the awareness that our actions are but a tiny part of his salvific plan which spans the ages, we should not give in to despair or desolation but resolve to live in hope.

As Václav Havel reminds us:

“Hope is not a prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart. It transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons ... Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. ... Hope is not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.”¹⁷

So, mindful of Rev. Martin Luther King’s warning that “we will need to repent in this generation not just for the evil deeds of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people”, we conclude with an invitation to action in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

Mere waiting and looking on is not Christian behaviour.¹⁸

Not in the fight of ideas but only in action is freedom.

Make up your mind and come into the tempest of the living.¹⁹

¹⁴ POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium*, 220.

¹⁵ JN 16:33.

¹⁶ MT 28:19-20.

¹⁷ VÁCLAV HAVEL, *Disturbing the Peace: a conversation with Karel Hvizdala*, Vintage Books, New York, 1990, 181.

¹⁸ DIETRICH BONHOEFFER in David Stevens, *The place called reconciliation: Texts to explore*, Corrymeela Press, 2008, 11.

¹⁹ DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, *Stations on the way to freedom in Ethics*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1995, 19.