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Being a good Samaritan in an age of terror

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Being a Good Samaritan in an Age of Terror

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Introduction

Thank you for the invitation to give the Aquinas Lecture. As a lay member of the Dominican Order, I am honoured to participate in an event holding the name of the Angelic Doctor even though I think he would disapprove of the rather dramatic title, 'Being a Good Samaritan in an Age of Terror'. To my mind, he always comes across as a gentle, modest character who always saw good in the world, equating the supreme good, God, with the common good of humankind since the good of all things depends on God¹. Equally, in our 'Age of Terror', we have to discover what makes for the 'common bad' and transform it through dialogue, reflection and action into the common good.

This evening, I want to talk about three areas:- the first is the huge prophetic role which the Church, its agencies and people have to play in engaging with the world for the good and how that is intrinsic to our identity. The second is to suggest that we do this best by looking at our world through the lens of the social teaching of the Church. The third is, after this reflection, to suggest what challenges we are presented with and ways of tackling them. But first, what does our 'Age of Terror' actually look like?

Do we live in an Age of Terror?

It was only a decade ago, in the early 1990s when we thought we were heading for the "perpetual peace" dreamed of by Immanuel Kant, as we saw the Berlin Wall crumble, the Soviet Empire break apart and an end of the Cold War that had stymied relations between countries and held the nuclear Sword of Damocles above all our heads for decades. Francis Fukuyama called this triumph of democratic capitalism the 'end of history' and we all expected a new, peaceful age to dawn. So, what happened?

First, it is now obvious that the Cold War with its many proxy wars and shoring up of authoritarian regimes was keeping the lid on wider discontents and new conflict broke out especially in Africa and in the Balkans. These wars followed the normal pattern of war nowadays, focused not on territorial ambition but on identity within the country. Nowadays, 90% of the victims are civilians as opposed to 5% in World War I and 50% in World War II. These wars result in already poor countries becoming even more impoverished and many of their people becoming displaced within the country or refugees outside. The local people caught up in those wars live through a terror that is scarcely credible.

Another form of 'terror' is the aggressive neo-liberal capitalism whose instruments such as International Monetary Fund follow a fixed ideology that results in impoverishing poor

¹ St Thomas Aquinas O.P., Summa Contra Gentiles 111,17

countries to the extent where violence results. While with a group of prelates lobbying G8 leaders before their summit earlier this year in Germany to keep to their promises to the poor, I met the German President, who is a former Secretary General of the IMF. He admitted it had to change because it was not interested in the human consequences of its policies, only the economic results. I find that terrifying. The influence of the Chicago School of economists, led by Milton Friedman, in producing poverty and violence has been immense. The reforms of privatisation, deregulation and cuts in government services forced on poor countries have often led to violence and have certainly led to more poverty or a poverty gap. The much heralded lifting of millions out of poverty in China has led to the less heralded increase of a doubling of the gap between rich city dwellers and the 800 million poor country dwellers. We hear a lot about the economic growth but much less about the 87,000 large protests that took place in China in 2005 involving more than 4 million workers and peasants, protesting at increasing rural poverty. They were, of course, brutally suppressed².

Terror exists in the rise in nationalism and religious fundamentalism that is the cause of violence in many countries from Ambon in Indonesia to ethnic clashes in Ghana and religious clashes in Nigeria. We all have to be wary of a nationalism which is not about the assertion of rights but the taking over of others' right to be different. We are on the verge of a new era of intolerance that can lead to authoritarian rule and more violence.

Climate change is also a source of terror. The UN Environment Programme published a report in June this year indicating that climate change is a major security issue and that global warming will cause new wars across the world. The conflict in Darfur is the first climate change war as it is a war over resources with a bit of racism thrown in for good measure. Another 61 countries have been identified as ripe for such wars. The common wisdom is that the countries that will survive in the future are those with a rich water and energy source but the next World War could be over water.

All these issues cause migration on an unprecedented scale. With increasing intolerance in previously welcoming countries for refugees such as the Netherlands and Australia because of a new fear of the other, hospitality could be replaced by human antagonism.

But for most people, 'terror' has come to mean only one thing – Islamist fundamentalists killing innocent people, especially Westerners, or waging ferocious wars to enslave people. Yet, as I have tried to indicate, whenever we have war, violence, exploitation, we live in an age of terror. The difference is that we who thought we lived in secure countries while wars raged elsewhere have now been made insecure by war coming into our homes. We all recently saw the anniversary of the Bali bombings where 88 young Australians were among the 200 plus who lost their lives. In New York, London and Madrid, to say nothing of Iraq or Afghanistan, many others mourn because of what we now call terrorist outrages. These outrages are perpetuated by the new actors who have appeared in the international political scene who oppose the triumphant economic and social model, oppose modernism and want to change both the balance of power in the world and the assumed cultural norms of the game and they are using religion, especially

² Naomi Klein, [The Shock Doctrine: the Rise of Disaster Capitalism](#), Penguin 2007.

but not entirely, militant Islam, rather than a political ideology as the rallying call. Behind it all is a sense of humiliation, resentment, hatred and despair at the non-resolution of running sores such as the suffering of the Palestinian people. Global terrorism, rather than being the only form around, is, in the words of the theologian, Robert Schreiter, “emblematic of the instability with which we live in our world today”³. In this world of instability and uncertainty, I think the Church and its agencies can offer a framework for moral and social judgments that lead to the common good. But first I want to say why the Church and its agencies should be involved in this world of terror at all.

Church Identity and the World

Being Church has three constitutive elements, all of which are joined to one another. They can be summed up in three words: word, worship, world. We need to hear the word of God through scripture, theology or preaching in order to have the foundation to understand and to hear a word of hope and life. We need to worship, to have a sacramental life, - to participate in Mass, meditation, prayer, reflection – to get in touch with the transcendent to “unmask the illusion of our possessiveness”⁴, as Henri Nouwen put it. And we need to engage the world in some sort of social mission where out of listening to the Good News, reflecting on the touching of faith and world, we transform, in the words of Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*, inhuman conditions into more human ones.

Looking at the World through the Lens of Catholic Social Teaching

As Catholics, we are urged to view the world through the lens of the teaching of our Church. We are then to judge the world by those principles and then act to try to convince the world that these principles are necessary to make our world more human. This is not arrogance but being faithful to our identity as Church which is at once a community of the baptised missioned to serve others and an institution established to serve the baptised and the wider community of our world. The ministry of serving the common good of society, promoting human dignity and human rights and standing up for the poor is intrinsic to the Church’s mission and life, not a sideline.

When we look at a phenomenon such as poverty, we begin from certain theological principles. This means we don’t look at our world as neutral bystanders but as followers of Christ. I want to take a look at our age of terror through the lens of three principles of Catholic Social Teaching:- the preferential option for the poor, the unity of the human family and the universal destination of the Earth’s goods. This forms a moral framework for viewing society which ensures that good of individual and common good of humanity coalesce.

The first principle is the preferential option for the poor, a perspective that examines personal decisions, policies of private and public bodies and power relationships in terms of their effects on the poor. Although there have been many millions lifted out of

³ Robert Schreiter, *A New Modernity: Living and Believing in an Unstable World*, 2005 Anthony Jordan Lectures, Edmonton, Canada, March 2005

⁴ Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*, Ave Maria Press 2005, p.25

poverty, notably among slightly better off people in India and China, the number of people living on less than \$US1 a day in this age of the globalisation of the economy is still 1.2 billion people, the same number of obese people in the West. Almost half of the world's 6 billion people live on \$2 a day. Such poverty leads, not just to being unable to put food on the table, but to human trafficking, prostitution, drug cultivation, the spread of pandemics like HIV/AIDS, children, especially girls, being taken out of school and a whole litany of social woes and ultimately violence. For us, as Catholics, it means that we have betrayed human dignity because people who live in such poverty cannot be the persons, the reflection of God's image, that they were meant to be. The world patently fails this first principle of putting the poor at the centre.

The second principle is the unit of the human family. Anything that leads to extensive exclusion damages that principle. 'Global' must be understood to be inclusive, as the Australian bishops have urged the people of this country in their latest social justice statement, 'Who is my Neighbour? Australia's Role as a Global Citizen'. Yet the gap between the rich and poor continues to grow. The average income in the world's richest 20 countries is 37 times the average in the poorest 20 – a gap that has doubled over the last 40 years. There is another worrying factor, illustrated in the Australian Government's recent report to APEC, "APEC and the rise of the Global Middle Class"⁵. The economic model being touted to our world is influencing our identity as human beings – distorting it into one of consumers only and those who cannot buy because they are too old or too poor, are marginalised and their identity eroded to the extent where they are treated like things. Human society should not be reduced to being a slave of the market. This leads to marked division in the human family, violence and further poverty. So our world flaunts this principle of the unity of the human family since it creates exclusion not inclusion, and is making us strangers to one another.

The third principle is that of the universal destination of the goods of creation – that is, when the goods of the Earth were created, they were created for all. The system of globalisation on offer has led to greater concentration of wealth in fewer hands with 60% of the world's population living on 5.6% of its income. It has also led to less access to decision-making processes not only for citizens but for small or weak countries to participate in multilateral institutions. It has led to a liberalisation of trade for the rich while controlling what crumbs they want to give to the poor. The world's poorest 49 countries make up 10% of the world's population but account for only 4% of the world's trade while rich countries spend \$100 billion a year to protect their markets with tariffs, quotas and subsidies – twice the aid budget. Both the European Union and the US Government give generous subsidies to their small numbers of cotton farmers while the 10 million cotton farmers of four countries in sub-Saharan Africa struggle to sell their unsubsidised goods and get deeper into poverty. The Europeans and Americans have plenty of options. The people in Mali and Burkina Faso don't. We see our world fails this principle of the universal destination of the goods of creation as the powerful replace need with greed.

⁵ APEC and the Rise of the Global Middle Class, Economic Analytical Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, September 2007.

So if this is our scenario, the seeds and fruit of our own Age of Terror, what does it mean to be a Good Samaritan in the 21st Century?

Being a Good Samaritan in the 21st Century

Let's unpack the story of the Good Samaritan in St Luke's Gospel (Lk 10:29-37) a bit since it is quoted so often that it really has lost its original shocking impact. We must understand that for a Jew of Jesus' time to combine the hated name 'Samaritan', people who had defiled the Temple and killed Jews, with 'Good' is akin to our saying 'a good drug dealer' or 'a good killer'. The Samaritans were hated and outsiders. The second thing is that the two people who walked by, the Levite and the priest, 'passed by on the other side' – they did not even go close to the injured man. They were either indifferent to suffering or did not want to bother or were maybe afraid as Jesus' time was also a kind of epoch of terror. The Samaritan, on the other hand, was 'moved by compassion' and went up to him to tend his wounds. I am told that the original Greek word translated by the word 'compassion' has its roots in the word for 'guts' or entrails. In other words, the man had not just a vague sympathy for the injured man but was so moved by the sight that a churning in his guts caused him to act. And how does he act? He does the relief work – bandaging and pouring oil and wine on the wounds. He then lifts him and takes him to an inn and then returns to give money and promises to do so again if isn't enough, so going beyond immediate relief to further human needs. And that is what being a neighbour amounts to, says Jesus.

So, in answer to our question of what being a Good Samaritan in the 21st century is about, we see it is about immediate relief and long-term development, from the institutional side. But it is also about radical compassion within us leading to acts of solidarity, including action and dialogue. As Church, we act in two ways – institutionally, mostly through Caritas for overseas work, and individually. Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, underlines this when he said that "love needs to be organised if it is to be an ordered service to the community" (#20) but that we all as Christians must "dedicate ourselves to others with heartfelt concern" (#31).

Caritas as the Institutional 'Good Samaritan'

Let's have a look at the institution first. Caritas and the option for the poor. An option for the poor is actually an option for the poorest. Nowadays, they would, in general terms, be women since 70% of the 1.2 billion people in poverty are women. Caritas all over the world supports women's projects, firstly because women will care for the whole family and secondly to try to lift them out of poverty. The poor would also be the despised – those on the margin of society. Among them would be the 42 million people living with HIV/AIDS, a disease syndrome that has not just destroyed lives but whole economies and societies. Sometimes, though, you have to look for the poorest. When the tsunami struck Thailand, the Thais and the tourists affected were the first to be helped. Caritas sought out two groups on the margins – the so-called sea gypsies and the many illegal Burmese refugees. In India, despite the opposition of the upper classes, Caritas insisted on helping the Dalits, the so-called untouchables, whose already meagre living had been destroyed completely. But serving the poorest has taken its toll. Last year, 85 aid workers were killed – mostly local people. In Iraq, Darfur and Afghanistan,

aid workers who were used to being welcomed as angels are often the targets for terrorists nowadays. Our colleagues in Caritas Sri Lanka have lost two workers to the war. Our workers, all of them Iraqi, in Caritas Iraq live in constant fear yet their centres are pockets of trust in a society whose fabric is fraying rapidly. Muslim women come to Caritas centres to ensure the prescriptions they have for their children will not do them harm, so rife now is the trade in human organs. The huge programme we run with the aid arm of the World Council of Churches in Darfur is constantly hampered by threats of kidnapping, robberies and death threats. We are seen as having been co-opted by the very global culture they despise or by the foreign armies of their soil – even when the workers come from the country itself. What does not assist us is the frequent attempt of armies and governments from our own countries to actually co-opt us. They engage in humanitarian work to win the battle of hearts and minds and have a political agenda. We engage in it out of a sense of solidarity, justice and the common good.

So how do we fare with the unity of the human family? One of the issues that destroys the fabric of human society is violence. It may not seem like it but there has in fact been a decline in the number of conflicts thanks to UN peace-keeping forces and other efforts to prevent conflict or resolve it but we live in constant threat of conflict breaking out again in many parts of the world. In Caritas Internationalis, we have trained 4,000 Caritas workers throughout the world in peace-building and reconciliation techniques. In the Balkans, where Croats and Serbs must try to live together again in peace, to promote dialogue between them, Caritas supports a project to create a special curriculum for their children but they must discuss the details of the project together and do so for the sake of their children. In Mozambique, an ethnic group chased away rebels that wanted them to take up futile arms against the Government after they had done the Caritas peace-training programme. But we also work at the level of advocacy. It's as if the Good Samaritan also went to the council in charge of the Jericho-Jerusalem road to lobby for lighting or a police presence. The Archbishop of Gulu in the north of Uganda where there was a brutal war raging and in which thousands of children had been abducted into the rebel army, asked us to bring the war to international attention. The CI delegate to the UN in New York used the information from the grassroots in his lobbying skills and, ultimately, adding our voice to the many others, a ceasefire was negotiated. These are some of the ways in which we are being true to the promotion of the unity of the human family.

And lastly, the universal destination of the Earth's goods. This is where Caritas lobbying comes into its own. We have a campaign to get rid of American and US subsidies on cotton to aid the 10m cotton farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. Caritas organised a lobbying of the G8 leaders before their summit in Germany earlier this year to hold them to their promises for fairer trade and more aid for poor countries. In 1970, 22 of the world's richest countries pledged to spend 0.7% of their national income on aid but by 2004, only 5 had kept that promise. So Caritas tries to make that principle of Catholic Social Teaching real. An analysis of these three principles shows that practical projects on the ground must go hand in hand nowadays with advocacy work and with peace-building and reconciliation work.

Being an Individual Good Samaritan

So how do we fare as individuals? As you see, there are many connections between relief work, development and advocacy and peace-building work. But individuals can work best on them all by lobbying on the Millennium Development Goals. Towards the end of the 20th century, the United Nations held a series of summits on matters of poverty or environmental degradation. In September 2000, 189 Heads of State and Governments, meeting at the UN General Assembly in New York, pledged solemnly to a whole raft of suggestions that would make our world better and healthier for the millions living in dire poverty. The then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, described the totality of these summits as 'the humanitarian agenda of the 21st century'. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were born. They group the aspirations of this humanitarian agenda into a set of goals which governments should achieve mostly by 2015 for their people.

For Christians, our aim must be to rid the world of hunger and poverty that dehumanises people created in the image of God. These goals don't do that. Some of us regard them for that reason as the *minimum* development goals but they are the only offer on the table that can dent poverty in any substantial way. They are politically feasible, affordable and already have the approval of all the world's nations. These goals were not a casual commitment. In 2000 every world leader signed up. Every international body signed up. Almost every single country signed up. That is why they are important.

Any changes in the world's system can reduce poverty. Through debt relief, Mozambique has been able to introduce free immunizations for children, Tanzania has abolished primary school fees, leading to a 66% increase in attendance and in Uganda an extra 2.2 million gained access to clean water. That is why these MDGs are politically feasible. The MDGs were a bond of trust between the rich world and the poor but already the goals are looking more and more out of reach. Present progress in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that primary education for all will not be delivered by 2015 but 2130 – 115 years late, when Kylie Minogue will be 162 years old! Poverty will not be halved by 2015 but by 2150 – 135 years too late. Avoidable infant deaths will not be eliminated by 2015 but by 2165 – 150 years too late.

The first seven goals cover getting rid of extreme hunger and poverty, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases and ensuring environmental sustainability. The last one is developing a global partnership for development. For poor countries to achieve the first seven goals, rich countries must deliver their end of the bargain in advance of 2015 with more effective aid, more sustainable debt relief and fairer trade rules. I looked Australia up on the 'Commitment to Development Index' which ranks the world's richest 21 countries on a series of development indicators. Australia comes 6th but 15th on aid, 15th on the sharing of technology and 19th on the environment. On aid, you are a long way from the 0.7% target (only 0.24%), much of that is tied to buying Australian goods and services and a large share goes to less poor and relatively less democratic governments. On the environment, you are the biggest per capita emitter of greenhouse gases in the world and

you have not signed the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. Whereas your policy on migration in the past was relatively open, that will now change with the announcement of a reduction in African migration. The first four countries on the index are from Northern Europe and the 5th is New Zealand. So there is plenty for the Church to advocate about, whether here in Australia or at the global level.

Transforming the Self

That is the action but the Good Samaritan story began with a change in the Samaritan man himself. He looked on the injured man by the roadside and felt this overwhelming sense of compassion for him before he moved to action. Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, which is one of two to mention Caritas by name, indicates that we have to foster this within ourselves. He says we need a “formation of the heart” (#31), that we need to “dedicate ourselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling the {the poor} to experience the richness of our humanity” (#31). St Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians says succinctly, “so for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old order is gone and a new being is there to see” (2 Cor. 5:17). Being involved in transforming our world, being a Good Samaritan today, starts with a transforming of the self, not a political manifesto. We need to reduce our ego to let in God’s spirit to lead us to do God’s work. My fellow Dominican from the 13th century, Meister Eckhart, wrote: “People should not worry so much about what they do but rather what they are. If they and their ways are good, then their deeds are radiant”⁶. The Buddhists say ‘if you want peace, learn not to slam doors’. Working for the MDGs and for other justice issues is not a matter of being politically correct or following mindless activism or because we are nice people. Being a Good Samaritan today has to arise out of the source of our being and then we realise that all we can do for the MDGs will not come from us but from the fact that we have allowed ourselves, through faith, to be used by God’s love. And that has an effect.

An example of what I am saying about the institutional and individual ‘Good Samaritan’ coming together is a story from Bam in Iran, where over 20,000 people died in a horrific earthquake a few years ago. That part of Iran is 100% Moslem and we had a team from several Caritas members working there in link with our Caritas Iran and in fact they are still there with the people. One of the Caritas workers, a sister, was asked by one of the earthquake victims, an old lady, for a Bible. “I can’t give you one” she said “the authorities would close us down and deport us but why do you want one anyway?” The old lady replied: “I want to see what makes you people treat us with such respect and love”.

Together, then, with our strategies about humanitarian or development work in this Age of Terror, we need to emphasise advocacy at all levels much more. We need to integrate peace-building and reconciliation practice into our programmes and have what John Paul Lederach calls the ‘moral imagination’⁷ to promote “building on humanity as a peaceable

⁶ Meister Eckhart, The Talks of Instruction n.4 from Meister Eckhart, Selected Writings, ed. by Oliver Davies, Penguin Books 1994.

⁷ John Paul Lederach, The Moral Imagination: the Art and Soul of Peacemaking (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

existence, a sensitivity to securing and sustaining justice and a capacity to imagine those rituals and other practices that will ground such peace and celebrate it regularly.”⁸ In other words, the world should know us not just by our presence or our professionalism but by our passion, our solidarity and commitment that put the common good of all humanity first.

Duncan MacLaren, Sydney September 2007

⁸ Robert Schreiter, *A New Modernity: Living and Believing in an Unstable World*, 2005 Anthony Jordan Lectures, Newman Theological College, Edmonton, Canada.