

The MISEREOR 2016 Lenten Campaign

Feature Article

THE FRAMEWORK

'Our common home – Our responsibility'

The two partners, CONIC (The National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil) and MISEREOR (The German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation), did not take long to agree on this theme for their joint Lenten Campaign. It forms the framework for the path we will take together through Lent. The two organisations possess over 50 years' experience in designing activities for Lent in both Brazil and Germany. 'Care for our common home', as Pope Francis's eco-social Encyclical Letter *Laudato si* is subtitled, motivates us to join forces in tackling the big issues affecting our common future, and seek to answer them in a spirit of ecumenism. This is what the United Nations expects the religions to be doing. In 2015, the Christian Churches provided inputs to the wording of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the targets for mitigating climate change. Lent 2016 is a good opportunity to create awareness of this task, call on politicians to take action, adopt new ways of behaving, and make donations to support those whose vital rights are under threat.

Mgr Pirmin Spiegel
Director General
MISEREOR

Today, the real borders are no longer the ones that separate countries. They are the borders between free and fettered, between poor and rich, and between access and no access to basic services. It is the task of the Churches and religions to help ensure that no one feels superfluous or useless. The joint Lenten Campaign 2016 will give this mission a face.

THE BRIDGE

'But let justice roll down like waters...

and righteousness like an everflowing stream' (Amos 5.24). This joint slogan is the bridge to our partners; to the Centro Gaspar Garcia (CGG) human rights centre in São Paulo that fights for the right to housing and the right to the city with people in the inner city; to the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT), in the Diocese of Itaituba in the Amazon basin, which is supporting the indigenous peoples and riparians in their struggle to prevent the construction of a dam; and last but not least to CONIC, which has placed the 'right to water and basic sanitation' at the heart of this year's ecumenical Lenten Campaign (*Campanha da Fraternidade Ecumênica*). The entire Campaign will revolve around (human) rights and justice. Cooperation with an emerging economy such as Brazil must focus on enabling and empowering people to claim and assert their rights.

'CONIC's mission is to strengthen the "ecumenism of service and justice". This international, ecumenical Lenten Campaign can also help achieve that.'

*Bishop Flavio Irala
President of CONIC, Brazil*

THE MOTIVATION

'The mercy of God is the beating heart of the Gospel'.

This beautiful quote from Pope Francis' letter inviting all who read it to participate in the 'Jubilee of Mercy' identifies what it is that is driving our care for our common home. To justice is added mercy, such that 'These are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a single reality' (MV 20). God is not indifferent to injustice and human suffering.

'As we can see in Sacred Scripture, mercy is a key word that indicates God's action towards us' (MV 9). This basic attitude of mercy that is God's can become our basic attitude: 'Be merciful, even as your father is merciful' (Lk 6.36).

'The season of Lent during this Jubilee Year should also be lived more intensely as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God's mercy' (MV 17).

Pope Francis

Rights threatened and violated

While private consumption has risen perceptibly for broad sections of the population in Brazil over the last few years, the realisation of civil rights has gone by the wayside. As Romi Bencke, General Secretary of CONIC, put it, 'They've made us consumers, but not citizens'. What she is referring to are the economic, social and cultural human rights that were adopted by the UN in the International Covenant of 1966, and which came into force under international law in 1976. Brazil and Germany have ratified this Covenant, and are bound by it.

Below, examples of the work of some of MISEREOR's partners are included that illustrate how human rights in Brazil are being threatened and violated.

The right to housing in São Paulo and the Gaspar Garcia human rights centre

'The Centro Gaspar Garcia (CGG) is a centre for the rights of people without rights', says René Ivo Gonçalves, one of the centre's managing directors and co-founders. The centre is there for people who sleep on cardboard boxes in front of the wrought iron doors of those private banks on whose roofs multimillionaires land in helicopters. In the megalopolis, the collision of extremes is particularly gross. A monument to poverty in the heart of a South American financial centre, the CGG is a thorn in the side of many who wield power. The poor were already driven into the peri-urban slums during the dictatorship. Today it is the high rents and property prices that make living close to the centre unaffordable. The city has grown from 700 square kilometres and a population of five million in 1965 to 1,500 sq. kms. and eleven million today, and cannot expand any further breadthwise.

With an average population density of 7,300 inhabitants per sq. km., this is the largest and most densely populated urban agglomeration in South America (Munich, for example, has 4,531 inhabitants per sq. km.) This growth has occurred largely without urban planning, and public infrastructure has been unable to keep pace. On the periphery in particular, accommodation and infrastructure are precarious, while transport costs and violent crime are high. Despite economic growth, the number of homeless people has doubled over the last ten years to around 15,000. A further two million people live in precarious huts, most of them along riverbanks or on slopes, or in squatted high-rise buildings that are often awaiting demolition (so-called *cortiços*).

After the military dictatorship was overcome, in 1988 committed Christians founded the Gaspar Garcia human rights centre – naming it after a priest murdered in the civil war in Nicaragua. The first target group were the poorest of the poor in Brazil: homeless people, beggars and waste pickers. Later on other groups were included – squatters, indigenous people, street vendors and slum dwellers. Social work began with a drop-in place in the city centre, which offered showers and warm meals.

Brazil

Capital: Brasília

Form of government: Federal republic

Cities: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Manaus, Salvador, Recife, Fortaleza

Area: 8.516 million sq. kms.

Population: 204.5 million (as at mid-2015)

Ethnic composition: Brazilians self-identify as white (49.9%), mixed race (43.2%), black (6.2%) and indigenous (0.7%).

Languages: Brazilian Portuguese is the official language (and is spoken by 97% of the population); almost 190 other languages are spoken, most of them indigenous (e.g. Guaraní, Munduruku, Yanomami).

Religious affiliation: 64.4% Roman Catholic Christians, 22.2% Protestant Christians, including a growing proportion of Pentecostals, 2% Spiritualists, 0.3% adherents of the Afro-Brazilian religion, 1,400,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, 225,000 Mormons, 245,000 Buddhists, 107,000 Jews, 35,000 Muslims, 7% nonreligious

Currency: Real, EUR 1 = BRL 3.49; BRL 100 = EUR 28.7

GINI coefficient: 52.6 (Germany: 28.3, 2012) (the lower the figure, the more equitably income is distributed)

Human Development Index: 0.744, ranked 79th (Germany: 0.911, ranked 6th; 2014)

GDP: USD 2,423 billion (2013). Brazil is the world's seventh largest economy. Per capita: approx. USD 11,500 (Germany: USD 3,636 billion [2013], the world's fourth largest economy, per capita: 44,999)

Literacy rate: 2003: 88.4%

Life expectancy: Men 71 years, women 79 years

Age distribution: 0-14: 24.08%; 15-64: 68.39%; over 65: 7.53% (Germany: 13.3%, 66.04%, 20.83%)

Brazilian-German trade relations: Brazil's main export products to Germany are iron ore, soya and coffee, civilian aircraft, copper and crude oil. Its major import goods from Germany include cars, automotive parts and accessories, chemical and pharmaceutical products, and machinery. 1,400 German companies operate in Brazil.

MISEREOR activities: In 2014 MISEREOR supported 281 ongoing projects in Brazil for a period of approximately three years. Most of these projects operate in rural areas.

Sources:

Data report 2014 of the DSW; Wikipedia; German Federal Foreign Office; HDR 2014; CIA World Factbook; country data

'Street dwellers', as they are known in Brazil, were also able to have mail sent there. As a result, people gradually began to feel at home and developed a sense of trust toward the social workers. 'Right from the start, though, we were aiming not only to provide social assistance, but also to make people aware of their rights', says General Secretary René Ivo Gonçalves, one of the founding members.

The fact that poverty always has a political dimension is a key part of the philosophy of the centre, which is based on the educational approach of Paulo Freire. This is why the centre required those affected to form groups, and organise themselves so as to give greater weight to their demands. 'Individuals are vulnerable, groups are strong', says Gonçalves. The human rights centre also applies this philosophy to shape its public image. Dozens of grassroots organisations in São Paulo form a dense mutual support network, which also performs political advocacy work with the city government, and at the federal and national levels.

Marginalisation and human rights violations have many faces. They include violent police raids against street vendors, inter-family violence, racism, evictions, and the absence of public infrastructure such as drinking water and sanitation connections, decent housing, waste collection and connection to the public transport network. The centre helps those affected gain a hearing for their concerns, and offers them legal advice. Its services include psychosocial support, help with pension claims, participation in social and housing construction programmes, and support in job hunting or marketing artisanal products. In cooperation with other human rights centres, a brochure was produced containing instructions for people on how to protect themselves against violent police officers. 'It was circulated throughout Brazil, and even the government later asked us for the license rights', recalls Gonçalves.

'We need to pursue a dual strategy. We provide one-on-one legal advice. That's one side of the coin. But without the other side, by which I mean self-organisation by the people that enables them to assert their interests through political channels, it won't work. Law and empowerment need to be seen in a single context.'

*Damasio, lawyer-to-be
Partner of the CGG*

Today there are similar flyers for women, street vendors and indigenous groups. The centre selects conflicts as examples, brings charges and by doing so creates legal precedents, for instance concerning a socially responsible approach by the authorities when conducting evictions or resettlements. Tens of thousands of people benefit from such laws and legal rulings. Over the last six years, the centre has supported almost 14,000 cases, and provided legal advice to more than 5,000 squatter families; it has helped 100 homeless people succeed in claiming their pensions and 20 families in obtaining centrally located housing. A further 3,000 people were integrated into social housing programmes.

As they help the inhabitants of the *favelas* and the *cortiços*, waste pickers, homeless people and many others fight for their rights to housing, their right to water, and

ultimately for their right to the city, the staff of the CGG experience the 'periphery in the centre', as they themselves put it – the margins of society in the heart of the city. This struggle is an unequal one that involves many setbacks and defeats. This is why Benedito 'Dito' Barbosa, the 'people's lawyer' as he calls himself, believes it is so important to 'keep the flame of hope burning in the people', and 'not to extinguish the glimmering wick', as Luiz Kohara adds. The latter is the second managing director of the centre, who strikes a prophetic note here that can be heard throughout the work of the CGG.

'We must not run away from society's contradictions. They are the very place where we must explore possibilities and locate traces of hope.'

Luiz Kohara, MISEREOR partner CGG

AND WHAT ABOUT US?

Affordable housing is also becoming scarce in German cities. At the same time, luxury flats are easy to sell. The right to the city is in jeopardy – the right to housing, to freely accessible spaces, to advertising-free zones. What are we doing about it?

The right to economic, social and cultural self-determination: a dam on the Tapajós and the work of the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) in Itaituba, Pará

We are many thousands of kilometres further north in the same country, yet in another world. At first glance, São Paulo and the River Tapajós do not have much in common. Yet here too we see a struggle for basic human rights. It involves the people who have lived along this river for generations and are known as *the ribeirinhos* in these parts, and the indigenous Munduruku people, whose traditional habitat and culture are under threat.

Padre João Carlos Portes of the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) sums up the history of Amazonia in the following sentence: 'There have been several booms here, first of all rubber, then gold, then the high-grade woods, and today the dams.'

It is a story of the exploitation of resources that began in the 19th century. Then as now, there is fast money to be made in the virgin forest. And here at the Tapajós there was a real gold boom in the 1980s. Before that, others grew rich through rubber and later on through high-grade woods. However, the nouveaux riches did not wish to live permanently in Amazonia, which is hot and humid. They preferred to invest their profits in real estate in São Paulo or deposit them in bank accounts in tax havens. The *ribeirinhos* – the riparians, simple farming and fishing families, and casual labourers – were left behind, to live with the luxuriant nature and the lack of infrastructure. Their lives follow quite a different rhythm from the one in São Paulo or Berlin.

A normal day might involve a mixture of fishing and work in the fields, looking for gold, catching ornamental fish or fetching palm hearts from the forest. There is always time for a chat or to cool off by jumping in the river, which most people use not only as their bathroom, but also for washing their clothes and doing the dishes. Every day a football match is held in the field in front of the church, and in their spare time the children climb trees, frolic in the river, carve spinning tops or play hide and seek between the houses. They are already the fourth generation in Pimental. Now they are under threat from the dam. And they are not the only ones. The Munduruku people, who have lived in this region for generations, will also be unable to remain if the planned dam floods their land. 'Eighty per cent of the families settled here have no land titles and have barely any schooling. This makes them easy prey for the land speculators', says Padre

João Carlos, parish priest in Trinta and founder of the local CPT. With a team of just three staff, this priest looks after the population of some 250,000 in the prelature of Itaituba, which covers 177,000 sq. kms., an area half the size of Germany). This area includes Pimental, whose 850 inhabitants are now all to be resettled in order to make way for a dam.

An invitation to tender for the São Luiz do Tapajós project will soon be published. When completed, the dam will be 53 m high and 7,608 m long. The reservoir will extend along a stretch of 123 kms, submerging an area of 729 sq. kms. The huge power plant will generate 8,040 MW of electricity.

This is part of a mega project to develop the rainforest as part of the government's official *Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento (PAC)* programme to accelerate growth in Brazil. The programme also includes other dams and dozens of ports, plus a waterway that (thanks to locks) would be navigable all year round, stretching from the federal state of Mato Grosso 1,500 km away, to Santarém and on to the Amazon's Atlantic estuary. This will enable Brazil chiefly to export soya. A consortium involving European companies such as the French electricity company EDF and Spain's Endesa has already completed initial studies, and is ready to go. Billions are at stake, as is Brazil's role as a future global power. Those driving the project seem to believe they can pay as little regard to a few *ribeirinhos* and a few small Munduruku villages as they can to the inevitable negative environmental impacts.

A struggle is currently under way to protect the future of the people who live here. A large proportion of the population have decided to resist.

'Where there is life, there is hope.'
Osileia, an inhabitant of Pimental

The Munduruku are fighting for the registration of their land, which according to the Brazilian constitution would prevent construction of the dam, were they to be successful. With help from the CPT, many inhabitants of Pimental are taking legal action to prevent the dam from being built. They have just won the right to a new, public consultation. There have also been protests in the major cities in the region, Itaituba and Santarém, to draw attention to the situation.

Ultimately, though, underlying this is the debate surrounding the development model for Amazonia. Should the region exploit its natural resources in order to integrate into the world market, produce energy for the industrial centres and provide rapid transport of agricultural produce such as soya to the world's ports? Or should it pursue a development path that is geared to the needs and the culture of the people living here? It is an unequal struggle, like the one between David and Goliath. Not everyone is joining it. In the local Pentecostal community you can hear things like: 'If God wants the dam, then it will come.' Some are placing their faith in promises of compensation and resettlement. As a German visitor, one is tempted to prematurely seek a pragmatic and socially compatible solution. MISEREOR's partner, the CPT, is relying on an approach to defend the dignity of these people, support their right to resist and strengthen their hope.

AND WHAT ABOUT US?

How do we profit from raw materials from the Amazon region and from cheap agricultural imports shipped from there? What kind of development model can we imagine for Germany, for Brazil, and for the world?

'My dream is that the government says: "This is your land", marks it out, and then we can stay.'

Chief Valter Dace and Chief Juarez, Munduruku

Tropical deforestation in Amazonia and drought in São Paulo

Twenty billion tons (200 billion hl) of water evaporate daily over the forests of Amazonia. These evaporated masses of water move westwards, where they are halted by the Andes, and in the summer months move south-eastwards toward Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, where they release moisture as rain.

On pastureland and cleared areas, which are being expanded in the Amazon basin, the capacity for evaporation is being greatly reduced. This results in extreme aridity, which caused extreme problems for the population of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in 2015. The clearance of forests for industrial agriculture, the construction of huge dams for energy production, the mining of ores and the logging of high-grade woods for export are causing problems not only for the local population in Amazonia, but also for people living in the industrialised regions of Brazil many thousands of kilometres further south-east. There are many reasons to assume that these interventions in Amazonia's ecosystem will also have global impacts.

The right to water and basic sanitation – the 'Ecumenical Campaign of Sisterliness and Brotherliness' of the National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil (CONIC – Conselho Nacional das Igrejas Cristãs)

Brazil is one of the most water-rich countries in the world. It is home to more than 10% of the world's freshwater resources. There really should not be any problems with water. Average daily per capita consumption is 166.3 litres. The UNO considers about 120 litres per day to be necessary. This is why the experience of water scarcity, which had previously been confined to the dry savannah region in the north-east of Brazil, came as a shock in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Scientists had already been drawing attention to this possibility for 15 years. Up until then, no one had believed that it could actually happen.

In 2013, 85% of households in Brazil were connected to the drinking water supply. Brazil is basically a country of major contrasts: There is the Amazonian rainforest in the north, the arid north-east, the agro-industrial west, and the industrial south-east and south. These regions differ significantly in terms of water supply, in some cases very considerably. The differences are all the greater regarding wastewater disposal, which poses one of the greatest infrastructural problems in Brazil. Based on its gross domestic product, Brazil is the world's seventh largest economic power. With regard to wastewater management, however, it ranks just 112th out of 200 countries worldwide. During the 1990s, Brazil's high level of indebtedness meant that it was subject to strict savings programmes of the international donors. The savings programmes imposed led to the cancellation of public investment in basic sanitation. The structural consequences can be seen today. 37% of water seeps away due to damaged pipes. Some statistics put drinking water losses at 60%, making Brazil one of the world's leading water wasting countries. Only about half the homes inhabited by the population of Brazil are connected to sewers, and only 39% of sewage is treated. This can be

seen particularly in the large cities, and in the warm months it becomes obvious from the smell. The River Tieté in São Paulo is one particularly sad example of this.

By 2033 the Brazilian government has identified an investment volume amounting to a staggering 302 billion reais (roughly 88 billion euros). This is a truly Herculean task, and one that will be difficult to implement in Brazil's patronage-based political system. Where the state has resumed investment after a long period, there is growing pressure from national and international enterprises to privatise these municipal services.

One example of this is water supply in São Paulo. The agency responsible is Sabesp (a Brazilian water provider based in São Paulo), half of which is publicly owned. The rest is traded in shares on the stock markets in São Paulo and New York. Edson da Silva of the national front for environmental rehabilitation has expressed the following criticism: 'The shareholders' drive to generate short-term profits has fuelled irresponsible water management [...] Even in 2014, the year of crisis when water was being rationed, Sabesp still paid its shareholders dividends of 75 million euros.' Declining consumption was offset through corresponding price increases. 'The shareholders never lose', says da Silva. The state, which had largely left water policy to market forces, reacted much too late. Although in 2010 the Cantareira reservoir, which supplies the metropolis and its millions of inhabitants, already reached the limits of its capacity as calculated when it was built 30 years ago, nothing happened to compensate this shortfall. On the contrary: Fuelled by corruption, uncontrolled logging and overgrazing in addition led to springs around the Cantareira drying up.

The politicians and the management of Sabesp completely disregarded the warnings of scientists and environmental activists. For grassroots organisations, the current water supply and sanitation policy is therefore anything but sustainable, and remains entirely unacceptable. They are working to protect the right to water and basic sanitation, which the UNO once again expressly reaffirmed as a human right in 2010. Similarly, CONIC is pressing for the enforcement of Brazilian law, which on paper guarantees water supply and sanitation for all.

The World Water Forum in 2018 plans to counterbalance the trend toward the privatisation of water supply. Its motto will be 'Water is a human right, not a commodity'.

AND WHAT ABOUT US?

In Germany, water is a different kind of issue: here it is less about the amount consumed on a daily basis. What remains critical is the contamination of surface and ground water, and the persistent attempts to privatise municipal waterworks. A further issue is the so-called 'virtual water' that is hidden in the products we consume every day; it is 'hidden' in the sense that it is used to produce and dispose of these products.

So the issue is the rights of people, human rights, especially those enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. We need to keep calling these rights to mind, defending them, fighting for them anew and strengthening them for the future; and we must do so within a global, just and sustainable perspective that we call the global common good.

'But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.' (Amos 5.24)

Any of the people described in the previous section might respond with these words: the inhabitants of the cortiços in São Paulo, the Munduruku, the Tapajós riparians, the Brazilians who are being denied fundamental human rights as they have no basic sanitation.

These words originate from Amos, the prophet who arose in the eighth century before Christ under the rule of Jeroboam II (782-753 B.C.). This was a time of great economic development for the king, the nobility and the large landowners. In Israel and Judah the merchants were doing business with foreign powers. The official religion, which was centred on the Yahweh cult in the temples at Bethel and Jerusalem, supported this business policy. But as with any expansionist policy based on the concentration of wealth, the result was social inequality and degradation of the natural environment. Farming families were dispossessed of their houses by the central government. Their livelihoods were taken away by taxes and tithes.

Amos denounces these ills of his time with abundant clarity: 'O you who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth!' (Amos 5.7) 'Therefore because you trample upon the poor and take from him exactions of wheat, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins – you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate' (Amos 5.11-12).

In the name of Yahweh, Amos wants none of this: 'But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream' (Amos 5.24). The God of Israel is passionate about justice, and expects His people to enforce it in their lives, through their rules of life and their laws. This takes practice, for which the practice of fasting – and in this tradition Lent – are particularly well suited. This is the argument put forward by the prophet Isaiah:

'Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and the day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard' (Is 58.5-8). We couldn't have described the development issues and theological concerns behind MISEREOR's Lenten Campaign better.

Guaranteeing the key rights to a decent life for all human beings, and ensuring the well-being of the planet, are fundamental components of the justice that the prophets proclaim as God's will. In Hosea we can read: 'Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel; for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bonds and murder follows murder. Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air; and even the fish of the sea are taken away' (Hosea 4.1-3).

Justice plays a crucial part in shaping relationships between people, and between them and their environment. When justice is lacking, the consequences are fatal.

The primacy of justice

Jesus reflects and affirms this unconditional primacy of justice. In the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel according to St Matthew, He says 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied' (Mt 5.6). Toward the end of the sermon he weighs up the things we seek, and makes clear: 'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well' (Mt 6.33). In other words, the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel according to St Matthew, this catechism of the young Church that contains practical instructions, guidelines and imperatives on how to follow Jesus, sets clear standards by which the communities that follow him must allow themselves to be measured to this day. Being a Christian is all about acting in ways that move us closer to the kingdom of God and His justice; it is not about the individual alone, or about the Church herself. If we follow this approach, everything else will be given to us.

Justice in the Biblical sense is first and foremost a 'relational concept' (Peter Cardinal Turkson). It refers to our relationship with God, with our fellow human beings and with the environment, and indeed with ourselves. Ultimately, a righteous person is a person who cares for these relationships and does not neglect or even exclude anything or anyone. In other words, above all else, justice is about our sense of community and how we build it. And this is why the Hebrew word for justice – *sedaqa* – is translated as 'fellowship' or 'communion'. Justice in its general form is manifested as harmony with the global order, with the cosmos and with the meaning that is to be discovered in the world. Justice guarantees the global common good, to use a phrase we often hear in the current debate.

Justice in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, justice appears particularly as a form of social justice that defines and regulates the life shared by the people of Israel, or at least should define and regulate it. This is what Gert Theissen calls 'utopian justice for the people'. The literal meaning of the word 'utopian' is: 'no place', or perhaps more accurately 'nowhere yet for a truly just society'. In the Ten Commandments, the people of God are offered rules of behaviour to govern their life together. They are supposed to take these with them to the land God has promised them in the covenant. Yet before they reach that land, they already break these rules many times. And life in the new land is by no means free of contradictions or violations of the law. The king, who holds special responsibility for upholding justice, violates it just like the rest of the people. As a result, prophets keep appearing who remind the people and the king of God's greater justice, on which the covenant is founded. As a result they suffer the 'fate of prophets', which is to be sent into exile and threatened, like Amos, who is banished from the country for his criticism.

The justice of Ancient Israel is thus in the first instance the basis for a 'good life for all'. Where it is made a living reality it 'exalts a nation' (Prov 14.34). It becomes a quality of life that shapes and ennobles our relationships with God, with our fellow human beings, with creation and with ourselves.

The foundation of this 'good life for all in justice' is creation, through which the gifts necessary for life are bestowed on all human beings.

From this it follows that all human beings in principle have an equal entitlement to the goods of Earth. Most importantly, no one may be excluded.

This leads to the second aspect of social justice in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Whether or not justice really is made a living reality is reflected in the way society deals with its weaker members. The Old Testament usually refers to the poor, widows, orphans and foreigners. This utopian universal entitlement to justice then becomes the option for the poor, the excluded and the other. These groups are then first in the queue when the goods are being distributed. Their role and their status in society are the yardstick for the presence of justice. Commutative and partial justice for these people thus does not exclude universal justice, but makes it possible in the first place.

Justice in the New Testament

In the Scriptures of the New Testament justice tends to appear in the context of its personal significance for individual human beings. In the Gospel according to St Matthew it is 'the better justice of action' (Theissen). The Sermon on the Mount in particular calls for righteous action when Jesus says 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness' (Mt 5.6). Justice is so vitally important that people can perish of hunger and thirst if they are starved of it. In other words, what individuals or small groups can contribute to society by way of righteous action is vitally important to the life of the community as a whole. Social justice as an entitlement and a utopia, and personal justice as an attitude plus action, thus converge. This becomes evident in the 'golden rule', which we might interpret as the quintessence, as it were, of the Sermon on the Mount, and indeed of the entire Judaeo-Christian tradition: 'So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets' (Mt 7.12). This rule is, incidentally, compatible with other approaches to life, way beyond the Bible, and offers a good basis for dialogue with all human beings who do not proclaim the Judaeo-Christian tradition. For the evangelists St Luke and St Matthew, this is even the 'better' justice, because it harbours the tendency to do good for its own sake. It contains an overabundance of goodness because it is born of the spirit of mercy (see Lk 6.36) and seeks to emulate the perfection of God (see Mt 5.48).

This righteous action is made possible by the 'gift of the justice of being' (Theissen), as interpreted by St Paul: 'Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom 5.1). Through Christ our relationship with God is restored, which enables us to establish a just relationship with our fellow human beings, with creation and with ourselves. We are under grace. We are free to act. Justice is thus not only the yardstick of our actions, but also the basis of our life and the relationships we have in it. Only in this sense, and in this order, does the grace that is bestowed on us turn the 'justice of being' into an obligation to 'act justly'. This helps establish social justice, which governs relationships within a society.

The crucial, critical contribution of the Bible: the 'option for the poor' and the 'option for creation'

One element of the discussion of the Biblical dimension of justice above merits special emphasis: justice as an 'option for the poor'. This is, as it were, the litmus test for justice within a society and in the actions of individuals. How do you treat the poor and those who are different, or, to recall the Biblical phraseology once again, how do you treat widows, orphans and foreigners? Those who are most vulnerable and whose social ties have been destroyed can and should be the first to enjoy our attention. We are talking here about a commutative kind of justice, designed to ensure inclusion. No one is lost, no one may be excluded. Everyone is invited. In the Old Testament, the

people are reminded several times that they were once foreigners in Egypt. 'He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt' (Deut 10.18-19). As well as the belief based on creation theology that the goods of the Earth are gifts that belong to everyone, here we see the memory of the covenant that God made with the people, just as they were experiencing oppression in exile. This covenant binds God and human beings to a fundamentally just framework of action that applies to the whole of society, and for that very reason must begin with its weakest members. The Sermon on the Mount addresses and affirms this primacy of justice that is meant for 'especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted' (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes* 1). From this point on, 'his kingdom and his righteousness' (Mt 6.33) and 'abundant life' (Jn 10.10) can come into being for all.

From a Biblical perspective, and against the background of today's global challenges, this person-centred logic can and must also be transferred to creation. The Earth is also suffering. Along with the multitude of the poor, she is the great impoverished sister (Leonardo Boff). In his Encyclical Letter *Laudato si*, Pope Francis says: 'This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her' (LS 2). There cannot be justice for human beings and for society without justice for creation, of which human beings are a part. This is one of the Pope's key messages.

The 'option for the poor, the excluded and the other' and the 'option for the stewardship of creation' go hand in hand. 'Fresh drinking water is an issue of primary importance, since it is indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems' (LS 28). As a largely freely accessible good, though, it is cheap. It is consumed in large quantities in agricultural and other economic processes, yet prices are not set at an appropriate level. Based on the widely accepted principle that 'things that cost next to nothing are worth next to nothing', it is often wasted, thus depriving millions of people of access to it. At the same time, in many places around the world extreme water scarcity prevails. Pope Francis also complains about the 'tendency [...] to privatise this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market. Yet access to safe drinking water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity' (LS 30).

The option for the poor and the option for the Earth, the great impoverished sister, are two sides of the same coin. Only the two together will make our common home worth living in for everyone, and only the two delineate the responsibility that we must shoulder.

The confluence of rights and water is a moment of prophecy. The right that should roll down like waters is also precisely the right to water and basic sanitation, as noted by the UNO back in 2010. In the spirit and within the framework of the preferential option for the poor and for the great impoverished sister, such 'human rights become a Christian obligation' (Hans-Joachim Sander); they oblige Christians and their Churches to ensure that human rights are acknowledged universally and urge that they be observed.

'The Earth doesn't need us. She would prefer it if we were to leave. But we need the Earth. Therefore we must treat her sustainably.'

*Sebastião Salgado,
world-famous Brazilian photographer*

'Merciful like the Father'

In conjunction with the Lenten Campaign motto 'Let justice roll down like waters', and in cooperation with the German Catholic Bishops' Conference, MISEREOR is responding to the motto of the Jubilee of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis: 'Merciful like the Father'. This makes it clear from the outset that justice and mercy belong together, and must not be played off against each other. In the classic words of Thomas Aquinas: 'Justice without mercy is cruelty; mercy without justice is the mother of dissolution.' Pope Francis clarifies: 'These are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a single reality' (*Misericordiae Vultus*, MV 20).

So if justice is what a society is aiming for in the spirit of Jesus, and is at the same time the practical criterion for following him, then mercy is what motivates such action. It is the 'beating heart of the Gospel' (MV 12). Let us listen to Amos once again. Following a further, harsh denouncement of the injustices of his time, Amos enquires about compassion: 'Shall not the land tremble on this account, and every one mourn who dwells in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again like the Nile of Egypt?' (Amos 8.8). Here, the 'globalisation of indifference' lamented by Pope Francis is contrasted with the globalisation of compassion. In this small land of Israel, injustice against the poor should churn up the river of Egypt (a global power), and make even the whole world tremble. The fate of others simply is not something about which we may remain indifferent. God is not indifferent to it, so those who believe in Him should not be indifferent to it either.

Learning this very lesson marks the beginning of the history of the people of Israel with their God Yahweh: 'I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey' (Ex 3.7f). God shares in their suffering. In this sense He is merciful.

'It is proper to God to exercise mercy, and he manifests his omnipotence particularly in this way' (Thomas Aquinas). The mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality [...] with which he reveals his love [...] moved to the very depths. Even more explicitly, a psalm points to concrete signs of mercy: '[...] who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; The LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down. The LORD watches over the sojourners, he upholds the widow and the fatherless; The LORD loves the righteous but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin' (Ps 146.7-9) (MV 6, arranged differently). In his book 'The Principle of Mercy', Jon Sobrino writes: 'Historically, this original mercy of God is manifested in the praxis and message of Jesus. In other words the *misereor super turbam* is not a one-off attitude on the part of Jesus; it is a systemic aspect of his life and mission, and brings about his demise. It also shapes his view of God and human beings. This is the context in which he tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In Jesus' view this is what a loving human being, indeed any human being, is like. The Good Samaritan is motivated to act the way he does by a spirit of mercy. Jesus also defines himself and his own actions in this way. This also includes the image of God he expresses in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (and the Merciful Father). If mercy describes who and what God, Jesus and human beings are, then, without any doubt at all, we can take this as something truly fundamental. Together with the entire Christian tradition, we can say that this is love. But we must add that mercy is a very specific form of love. It is a practical love that

arises in the face of suffering unjustly inflicted on others, in order to put an end to that suffering, for no other reason than the mere fact of its existence, and without there being any excuse at all for not doing so.

In other words, mercy is a basic attitude in the face of the suffering of others. Jesus heals on the Sabbath not because he was a liberal, but because he was merciful (Mk 3.4ff).' (Jon Sobrino, *El principio misericordia: Bajar de la cruz a los pueblos crucificados*, 1992 Editora Sal Terrae, Santander p. 34f; translated into German by Thomas Schmidt; translated from the German by John Cochrane).

'Nothing in him is devoid of compassion' (MV 8), says Pope Francis. Jesus touches lepers, and allows himself to be touched by the woman with an issue of blood. And in his Sermon on the Mount he says: 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy' (Mt 5.7). And in the verse prior to that he emphasises: 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied' (Mt 5.6). Here again, justice and mercy go hand in hand.

The Works of Mercy are born of this basic attitude. The principle of mercy avoids paternalism, as well as a mere feeling of sympathy with no consequences. It also avoids purely short-term emergency assistance measures that fail to take up the struggle against the structural roots of injustice and suffering.

Seen from this perspective, ultimately there can be no such thing as the suffering of others in an exclusive sense. As the fellow human beings and fellow creatures of those who suffer, we share in their suffering. Since this attitude of faith is anything but self-evident, we need special times during which we can practice it. Lent is one such time. And it requires daily prayer, which Mercedes Sosa expresses in her song: 'Solo le pido a Dios, que el dolor no sea indiferente.' – 'All I ask of God is that I will not be indifferent to pain.'

This is how mercy becomes the basic attitude of Christians and of their Church. 'The Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God's mercy. Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy' (MV 25).

Here is Jon Sobrino once again: 'Mercy is not the only thing that Jesus practised. But it is the point from which his actions proceed, and it determines his life, his mission and his end. The principle of mercy thus gives shape to all the other dimensions of life: knowledge, hope, celebration and of course action. For Jesus, mercy is the beginning of both the human and the divine (see Mt 25). This is the crux of life.'

And last but not least: mercy is a beatitude. It is a glad tidings. It encourages us to embrace faith, hope and charity, and also justice.

'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness' (Mt 6.33)

According to what Jesus says here in the Sermon on the Mount, this concern for justice is the supreme principle of Christian action. It has priority in everything we do – whether we do it as individuals, members of a political group or members of the Church. Whoever believes in it, will be motivated to act; whoever acts in that spirit, will be motivated to believe. During his incarceration in Tegel in 1944, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: '... Our being a Christian will be confined today to only two things: praying, and acting justly among people. All thinking, speaking and organizing of the things of Christianity must be born out of this praying and this acting.' (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung*, 12th edition 1983, p. 152.). These thoughts of Bonhoeffer's remain valid to this day. Prayer makes us aware of our relationship with God, and cultivates it. Saying the psalms in particular keeps the big questions alive, and nourishes our thirst for justice. Praying in this way, we then need to 'act justly among

people', which includes our fellow human beings on our doorstep, those far away and those who will be born in the future. And it means doing so in 'sustainable love' as our Brazilian partners put it.

1. Rights and justice in the activities of our partners

In the centre of the city of São Paulo, 'acting justly among people' has assumed a concrete form. The Centro Gaspar Garcia human rights centre advises individuals who have nowhere to live or only precarious accommodation, helps those affected form solidarity groups, supports their struggle to gain housing, water and infrastructure, and is always available throughout the ups and downs of these processes, which take years. The centre sees rights as rights, rather than charity. It encourages people to stand up for their rights. Those whose rights have been violated then take active control of their situation. With heads raised, they take their lives and the lives of their families into their own hands.

'We want to enable and empower people threatened by the dam to take control of their struggle for survival in this region themselves, and to fight their own battle. They are the protagonists, they are the ones who should stand up for their rights and their territory.'

Padre João Carlos, CPT Itaituba

In the completely different context of the Tapajós in Amazonia, we see this same trait. The CPT does not seek to distribute land, seed or machinery; it sets out to support people in their struggle for land. For forty years it has been following the principle that the land belongs to those who work on it. It is convinced that the small farming families, the traditional communities, the riparians and the indigenous peoples have a right to their own land as well as to economic, social and cultural self-determination. In other words, along the Tapajós it supports people who have already been living there a long time, and whose right to remain is under threat. The primary aim is to enable people to stand up for their own rights. To do so they often require logistical support when participating in public consultations or when holding assemblies, and they need legal advice and help with court cases. The CPT also aims to raise public awareness of their cause in the region.

But above all it is about encouraging people, time and time again. In Itaituba the CPT does all this and much more. Its solidarity does not depend on the success or otherwise of the struggle. 'The struggle against the dam would not come to an end once the dam were to be built. Even then, the struggle for human rights would continue. It would just be a new stage of the same struggle. We would not simply disappear if the dam were to come. On the contrary, we are here at this very moment, and we will still be here if the dam is built, and we will still be here after the dam, when someone needs to pick up the pieces with the population.' (Padre João Carlos, CPT Itaituba)

To support people along the Tapajós, CONIC and MISEREOR are planning a joint petition. To find out more and see how you can get involved, please visit: www.misereor.de/kein-staudamm-am-tapajos (in German).

The National Council of Christian Churches in Brazil (CONIC) also sees its engagement for water and basic sanitation as the enforcement of a right that is derived from human rights and is enshrined in Brazilian legislation. The basic text produced in

conjunction with the Brazilian Lenten Campaign, the *campanha da fraternidade ecumênica*, contains various proposals as to how individuals and communities can participate in the struggle. These include 'seeing reality in your own district or village', 'changing your personal behaviour with regard to water, solid waste and waste water' and 'encouraging the formation of local committees' calling for local policy-makers to implement a long-term and sustainable infrastructure policy.

Handouts have also been produced for various liturgical celebrations, songs, prayers, Bible work and catechism, as well as for collecting money for projects that will be redistributed to initiatives dealing with water supply problems through the Church solidarity fund. The money donated is seen first and foremost as a gesture of solidarity, designed to concretise the motto 'Let justice roll down like waters' (Am 5.24). Justice requires action. The truth of faith is a practical one that is demonstrated in every step that helps bring about 'abundant life for all'.

A million cisterns – water supply and justice **A positive example**

The basic text on the Lenten Campaign 2016 in Brazil says: 'In rural areas, the issue of water supply is a different one from what we see in the urban agglomerations. In the countryside it is customary to obtain water from a well or directly from the spring. Depending on the area concerned, a water truck may drive through the villages. Often the only water to which rural communities have access is contaminated due to the inappropriate treatment or final disposal of solid and liquid waste. Large-scale cattle farming, mining, industrial plants, sugarcane factories, dams, timber companies and inappropriate, unsustainable soil treatment contaminate wells, waterholes and springs.' One positive example is the construction of cisterns to collect water in the desert-like north-east of Brazil. These cisterns are not connected to the water supply network. They collect rainwater flowing from the roofs. The technology used is appropriate to the area, and has solved the problem of access to water for thousands of families. For many years MISEREOR has been supporting the agricultural non-governmental organisation IRPAA ('regional institute for appropriate, small-scale agriculture') that is promoting the construction of cisterns in the north-east of Brazil. As well as providing direct access to water, these cisterns also have another, equally important function. Using large tankers, the elites in the north-east distribute water to the poor population, and by doing so keep them in a state of dependency. The cisterns are making people independent of this distribution system, and thus also independent of local potentates. In this way water is becoming the basis for the right to economic, social and cultural self-determination.

Where water flows, justice can roll down like waters.

2. Rights and justice in our own hands

A concrete gesture of solidarity during Lent

The basic text for the campaign in Brazil says: 'We have received a moving proposal to care for the common home that God has given us, and turn it into a healthy place where sisterliness, brotherliness and justice flow like rivers of living water. May God help us to perform this beautiful task with joy and a willingness to shoulder responsibility. As a sign that we accept this obligation, we propose during Lent to make an effort to avoid excessive consumption and wastage of food, to include a day of fasting and to give to the poor what this enables us to save during Lent.' In Brazil the money will go to the Church solidarity fund, in Germany it will go to MISEREOR.

The project examples showed that the donations which MISEREOR receives do not just go to poor people. They go to poor people who have set out to take their lives into their own hands and claim or defend their rights. A donation is therefore much more than generous 'almsgiving'. It is something we give in a spirit of compassion, solidarity, sisterliness and brotherliness.

The Earth's future is at stake

The work of MISEREOR's Brazilian partners in particular teach us that the people there do not need primarily material donations, which are appropriate in emergency and disaster situations. Brazil is considered a rich country, which makes the poverty of large sections of its population all the more scandalous. According to the CIA World Factbook of 2009, the figure is 21.4%. Poverty results from an extremely inequitable and unfair distribution of goods, land and assets. The help that we are able to provide with our donations is therefore designed to implement justice, to facilitate a society from which no one is excluded and in which goods are fairly distributed. And we take account of the other dimensions of justice, such as gender justice, intergenerational justice and climate justice. The promised 'abundant life for everyone' (Jn 10.10) cannot be conceived of in terms too grand. Taking all aspects into consideration, it quickly becomes clear that our current lifestyle, which is eating up the Earth, is fundamentally questionable. What Pope Francis emphasises in *Laudato si* is correct: 'Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress' (LS 194).

For this huge task we need to reorient our lives and our cooperation with Brazil. Traditional development cooperation is turning more and more into joint work on our common home, for which we will continue to share responsibility, albeit in different ways of course. This applies to state cooperation just as much as it does to the work of the Churches. No one country alone, no one Church alone, can deliver the answers to the major questions affecting our future. A joint Lenten Campaign of the Churches in Brazil and Germany will attempt to raise awareness of our common responsibility for the Earth, for our One World, and practice it in small steps.

Making a donation means:

- *Standing shoulder to shoulder with the poor*
- *Helping people help themselves*
- *Investing in rights and justice*
- *Participating in the 'offertory of solidarity'*
- *Setting an example for sharing, and for sisterliness and brotherliness*
- *Changing direction onto the path of life*

www.fastenaktion.de (in German)

A glance in the mirror that Brazil holds up to us

The quest for justice in Brazil leads us to raise the issue of rights and justice in Germany and in Europe (once again we are looking at two sides of the same coin).

Are things always just here in Germany and Europe? Does Germany, through its foreign policy, its economic policy, its export strategy and its investment behaviour in many countries of the world, really always play a role that leads to greater justice? A glance at Brazil leads us to recognise problems that we are not unfamiliar with here. Property speculation in São Paulo and the crowding out of the poor population are immediately reminiscent of the rapid rise in rents in many of our major cities, and the enormous difficulties this causes, particularly for many low-wage earners.

In Germany as in Brazil, large-scale industrial and infrastructure projects often disregard the interests of the local population. In both countries, a way of doing

business that is based on regional structures and is adapted to local conditions will face difficulties. In both Brazil and Germany, CO₂ emissions are higher than our Earth can bear. Joint approaches and the joint quest for solutions are urgently required.

In the context of water, what our two countries have in common are pollution, and the risk of privatisation of water and municipal waterworks.

Brazil is the 'world champion' of fertiliser use. In many places in Germany, prevailing agricultural practices mean that nitrate burdens in the groundwater have reached alarming levels. Whether water is a common good and therefore belongs to everyone, which would mean that access to water is about providing a service of general interest, is an issue that is generating heated debate everywhere. Water is not a commodity, and high-quality water must therefore be freely available to everyone. We must defend this view worldwide.

The idea behind the campaign – Flying the flag for justice

Christians and their Churches cannot be indifferent to the continuous bending of the law and the lack of justice. In the tradition of Amos and all the prophets, and not least in the tradition of the prophetic itinerant preacher Jesus of Nazareth, they are flying the flag for justice. This is why we are suggesting that people stand up for justice by designing flags during Lent. These flags should make clear what we believe in here in Germany and Europe, in Brazil and worldwide.

So set an example by writing or painting your own very personal message on large and small flags made of paper, cardboard, bed sheets or tablecloths. Do this in your parish, your club, with your family or at your school. Hang your flags up during Lent where people can see them, in your church, in your window at home, in the parish hall or in the school foyer. A photo of your work, sent in to MISEREOR by email, uploaded to Facebook or printed out and sent in with a letter, will make an attractive addition to a large digital gallery that we will be publishing online.

Let your imagination run wild. The important thing is to fly the flag, make your position clear and not hide your views. Together with MISEREOR, take a stance for the people whose rights are being denied, ignored or abused, and against all the injustices that we come across and are concerned by on a daily basis.

To find out more, please visit: www.fastenaktion.de

Works of Mercy

According to tradition, St Francis said: 'Preach the Gospel and, where necessary, also use words.' And Martin Luther found it comforting to 'Plunge Christ into the flesh'. A basic attitude of mercy that is not opposed to justice, but even comprises the greater justice (as explained in the previous section), needs Works of Mercy to make it tangible. Here we need to be clear about the fact that a Good Samaritan (Lk 10.25-37) today must not only help those who have fallen among robbers, but must also help eliminate the 'structures of robbery' (Bishop Kamphaus) so that no one else, or at least fewer and fewer people, will fall among the robbers. Analysing the causes of suffering, providing concrete assistance and pressing for structural change go hand in hand.

Against this backdrop we would like to recall the Seven Works of Mercy, which the German theologian Fulbert Steffensky called the 'canon for the good life'.

Lenten Veil from the Middle Ages

The Works of Mercy (with the exception of the work of 'burying the dead') all have a Biblical basis in Jesus's great discourse about the Last Judgement in the Gospel according to St Matthew. For the actions of Christians and their Churches, these are binding examples. Lent can be a time to recall and practice them. They are less of a

moral appeal, and more of a pointer as to where we can meet and serve Christ himself, and minister in the midst of life: 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Mt 25.40). The converse also applies (see Mt 25.45-46), which once again underscores how serious the matter is. In the poor, 'in the sacrament of the brother' (Hans-Urs von Balthasar) and the sister, we encounter Christ. In the words of Paulo Suess: 'Mercy opens our eyes to the reality in which the poor person is robbed and the other is despised. Mercy as the greater justice and greater love allows us to struggle for the distribution of goods and for recognition of the other. In this struggle we meet the crucified and risen Lord. He reminds us that the lives of the crucified in history can be changed through the Gospel. This is not a "structured teaching"; this is compassion, solidarity and engagement.'

Perhaps we then feel like Christians in the way described by the Quakers:

*'Immensely happy,
absolutely fearless and
always in trouble.'*

The triangle 'SEE – JUDGE – ACT' also includes an element of celebration. This method, which was developed by Joseph Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers (YCW), and remains alive to this day in the basic Christian communities in Latin America, has given the present feature article its structure. Over the last few years it has been extended to include the element CELEBRATE, and for good reason. Celebration is part of faith, just like seeing, judging and acting. Ernesto Cardenal once put it poetically: 'We have not yet arrived in the banqueting hall, but we are invited, and we can already see the lights and hear the music.'

The invitation still stands to this day. This is why we are now concluding this feature article with an invitation to celebrate an ecumenical Church service designed to give thanks for justice and mercy, and encourage those taking part to practice both – in a spirit of ecumenical sisterliness and brotherliness, and care for our common home.

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