

That you act justly...

[Br John Deeney](#)

A long struggle

The recent election campaign of Barack Obama has provoked a large amount of coverage of the history of the struggle of black people to achieve freedom and justice. Back in the 18th century there were already articulate campaigners in America and in Britain, often with grim stories of their own to tell about how they had been treated. Just over 50 years ago Rosa Parks was arrested for sitting in a bus seat reserved for whites; a trivial event that was to spark off the high profile civil rights movement which leads directly to today's situation where a black man can be president of the US.

Perhaps all those early campaigners always believed that justice would be done in the end. The 200 year time span involved would have been daunting had they known about it, but because they lived and worked in hope they would have been prepared to accept that the promised land lay somewhere beyond their reach. Their efforts have borne fruit, finally, and we can be inspired by their example in the campaigns in which we are involved today – the drive to eliminate extreme poverty, the aim of getting all children into school, the acceptance of women's rights, the control of the arms trade, etc.

In this Year of St Paul, we should also notice the passion which drove him to announce the good news to all peoples. Even with his limited worldview he must have realised that the task was not one that he would complete and that he would have to pass on the mission to others. Oscar Romero phrased the situation beautifully for us in modern times when he said, "We work for a future not our own."

Insulation

As the winter winds begin to whistle through the cracks around the window frames it is nice to draw the curtains in the evening and sit in a cosy chair in

a warm room with a mug of tea and a biscuit. Though perhaps you are in a well-built house where the windows and the doors fit tight and the insulation keeps the cold and damp at bay with a minimum of effort. That would be helpful in conserving energy and for living comfortably and economically.

But it isn't just cold that we can be insulated from. We can also keep discomfort and uncertainty at bay and we can keep other people's problems at arm's length as well. There is a financial squeeze under way which may not have caused us too many problems yet so it is important to hear how it affects others and to examine how we might react. "As a pensioner, I manage financially because I go to bed at about 7pm and watch TV. I turn my heating off and

don't get up till about 10am because it helps save money." And another witness: "I find it a great struggle when prices rise. Fresh vegetables are the thing that I can't get hold of because my money doesn't stretch that far."

The word 'insulation' has links with island and the Latin 'insula', meaning something detached from its surroundings. How detached are we from our poorest 'neighbours' and from those people living in most difficulty in our world? Insulation of the mind and heart is more like a disease than an attribute.

Turmoil

We don't seem to go for any length of time without war and violence being highlighted somewhere in the world, though often what we see mentioned is just the tip of the iceberg. Somali pirates are just a tiny glimpse of the anarchic state that has afflicted Somalia for many years. The atrocities in the eastern Congo are the culmination of years of weak government in the area and ineffectual attempts to solve ethnic tensions. Since the solutions required are largely political, it is possible for well-motivated and impartial countries from outside these areas to



assist in solving them. Well-motivated governments, though, need the mandate of their own people to feel that it is worth their while getting involved so all those letters and emails to politicians are worth the effort.

Sometimes it is not just our own government that needs to hear our voices. When India celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence last year, much was made of the fact that for all its enormous size, diversity and problems, it had remained a functioning democracy. Just a year later the blatant and violent persecution of Christians in certain areas is showing how precarious democracy might be. The persecutions are mostly for ideological and political purposes and are driven by Hindu fundamentalists who dream of the past golden age of an India that never existed – rather as if England were to believe literally in the chivalrous ages of King Arthur and his knights or in a pure ‘Englishness’. But if the dreams are unreal, the violence certainly isn’t. A Catholic priest, Fr. Digal, who was badly beaten specifically because of his religion during the carnage wreaked by Hindu fundamentalists in Orissa, recently died because of his injuries. The local authorities have allowed that and other well-publicised atrocities to

take place. Pressure of international complaint is required in order to push the national government to exert more control in such situations and to combat injustice.

Stay informed

An immigration and citizenship bill is due to be brought before Parliament in early 2009 in an attempt to codify all the immigration laws introduced since 1971. Undoubtedly it will raise many questions about how we treat immigrants and refugees.

A useful compendium of links to all sorts of national and international ethical issues can be found at www.ccfon.org

Reclaim Christmas is a campaign being promoted at www.operationnoah.org and it has something to say to all of us.

[Cafod](#) and [Progressio](#) also have materials relevant to the world situation but focussed on use during Advent.

And for something very close to home, the Get Fair campaign is a wide coalition of groups pushing for an end to poverty in the UK: www.getfair.org.uk