

Mercy Advocacy

*Today the signs of the Times are confusing and frightening.
They have been so before.*

*“Beware of discouragement: it is the death
of the soul.”*

*- Antione-Federic Ozanam (1813-1853)
Founder of the Society of St Vincent de Paul*



Seeding the Future with Others
October 2014



On Mercy Day we reflected on the current face of slavery – human trafficking. As always in addressing issues of justice our first task is to find the human face.

Jesus is very clear:

“In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers (and sisters) of mine you did to me.”
Matthew 25:40

“In truth I tell you, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me.”
Matthew 25:45

Finding the human face

He was a young man in his 20s and he carried his experience of the world on his young face. It didn't look like he was winning the battles;

“As I stood at an intersection waiting to cross, a woman's raised voice said, ‘Get a job!’ She came and stood beside me, her face tight and her body tense, an ordinary woman being rude to the vendor of the Big Issue. It is easily done.*

20 years ago a young French family invited me to their hotel to share lunch after Sunday Eucharist. The husband was an economist and during the meal made the comment that the austerity measures put in place by the International Monetary Fund would bring Jamaica out of crippling debt.

I mentioned it was good to be out of debt but it also meant that fewer children would go to school, that fewer children would start school, that health clinics would have less medicine and fewer services because these were the areas where the cuts would be made. People who once bought chicken flesh would now buy 'chicken back' - the bony part of the chicken you boil to get all the sustenance you can now the price of chicken would be beyond their means.



The Frenchman who was an intelligent good man looked at me with a lack of comprehension on his face. My perspective on the crippling debt issue had left him silent. He did not agree or disagree. He seemed to be thinking about what I said. People are not units of data, but once we dehumanise them, we can do anything to them.

Jesus identifies with the least of people. Our challenge is not to lose 'the human face' of our brothers and sisters."

- Abridged from the editorial ***The Far East*** - September 2014
Gary Walker, Director of Columban Mission Society

** The Big Issue is an independent and excellent magazine sold on the streets by homeless or marginalised people. For every magazine sold, the vendor gets half. It has helped many people get back on their feet.*



In the current situation ‘listening for the Spirit’ can help us find the human face.

The new national reality, ‘**Team Australia**’ offered to us and to immigrants in the wake of the latest terrorism threats, has unsettled more than a few readers. Amazing as that might seem to those who say ‘*if you’re not with us, you’re against us*’ it is a divisive policy that

“casts suspicion on all immigrants of Islamic faith as supporters of ISIS. The problem with Tony Abbott’s Team Australia is that it is not about inclusion and defining who is an Australian, it’s all about casting certain groups in our community as non-Australian...”

Bob Eggleton of Neutral Bay

Postscript (Aug’14) to Letters Sydney Morning Herald by co-editor Marc McEvoy



Suicide attempts are never a form of blackmail –

“The fact that it has become necessary for our detention centres to employ shift workers to physically prevent inmates from committing suicide is disappointing in itself (‘Mental health crisis affects detention staff, Aug 21’)

However, this fact is not as disappointing as Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s action of labelling the suicide attempts of mothers on Christmas Island as ‘moral blackmail’.

Suicide attempts are not a method of psychological warfare that suffering and powerless asylum seekers are waging on our politicians. People attempt suicide because they have lost all hope in their lives ever improving.

Indeed the fact that Australian government policy is reducing individuals to such a state while the creators of these policies completely dismiss their anguish is enough to prompt one to lose all hope for the empathy and humanity of our politicians.”

*Julia Rheinberger (aged 16)
Beecroft - letter to the Sydney Morning Herald*



Where is compassion?

“The Government believes in a strong migration programme and won’t sacrifice it under a guise of ‘false compassion’ that, in turn, encourages more illegal arrivals on unsafe boats.”

*From the Prime Minister’s response
to a letter from one of our Sisters questioning current asylum seeker policy*

“...you’d have to be a monster to say that it’s acceptable that nearly 2000 people have drowned at sea trying to get to Australia. The question is whether we have really tried to find another solution. Have we really tried to work with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to set up a regional processing system that might offer people an alternative to getting on boats? Of course we can’t just let people drown. But what we are doing now is calculated cruelty.”

*Sr Brigid Arthur
Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project – Melbourne*





What is our task?

To act, to support, to research, to restate the truth:

- Read John Wesley's stirring letter inspired by the words of a former slave and written during his final days urging the MP William Wilberforce to press on in his long-running attempts to abolish slavery.
- Send a message of encouragement to those MP's, commentators, community leaders, individuals who question, suggest alternatives, speak/write positively on issues affecting those marginalised in our society
- Continue to make known your stance on current/proposed policy to your MP and Senators.
- Check the statistics found on Refugee Council site measuring our part in answering world refugee needs.
- Research the question of Constitutional Recognition

“Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world ...would do this it would change the earth.”

William Faulkner





**Compiled by Genevieve Caffery and Dolores Creevey
on behalf of the Members of the Reference Group**

