Addresses

Faith and Justice, Poverty and Unemployment:
How Do They Relate and What Can We Do?

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In his letter of invitation to this dialogue, Premier Clark asked a group of British Columbia's spiritual leaders from a variety of faiths to assist his government in assessing the choices and options facing British Columbia as we approach a new century. Clark says, "The greatest challenges facing government are economic," and then asks these important questions: How can we create jobs? How should our economy's wealth be distributed? How should we deal with persistent poverty and continuing high levels of unemployment? How should the government's fiscal policies reflect these priorities? Premier Clark tells us that there is hardly a week that goes by when he does not meet with the province's business, community, or labour leaders to wrestle with these questions. While each group brings particular expertise and concerns to the table, however, "none of them considers these issues from a broader moral and ethical perspective." Clark then issues this challenge: "With your help, I would like to change that."

In this introductory address I will share some of my thoughts on how we may do this. I do not pretend to speak on behalf of any faith-

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community. However, I will speak from the faith-perspective that shapes my approach to life and public-policy issues. I hope that my remarks will contribute to a candid discussion on "the issue of jobs and economic justice."

I support Premier Clark's wish to initiate a dialogue with the province's leading religious figures and to seek their advice and views on the fundamental problems confronting the government. An open-hearted dialogue about core values and policy priorities, particularly as they relate to the challenge of job creation, is both *timely* and *legitimate*. Timely, because the serious problem of unemployment, especially among our youth, is deeply affecting people's well-being and sense of their future; and legitimate, because the problem of unemployment has acquired a new dimension today. If we take seriously the history of the past two decades, then unemployment, as striking as it may sound, appears to have become unsolvable. None of the economic instruments used to combat unemployment over that period of time have resulted in significant improvements to employment levels in Canada. Unemployment appears to have become immune to the accepted medicine, like a pest that has developed a resistance to the pesticide. Moreover, this sense of irresolvability is rapidly permeating our society. In this respect, the general population may be well ahead of our decision-makers. One of the key lessons of the recent federal election, in my view, is that though voters ranked jobs number one on their list of priorities, they had almost no confidence that any of the political parties, who by and large touted the old remedies, possessed a real solution to widespread joblessness and poverty, and the social misery that accompanies these.

Unemployment: A Question of Values

If this thesis is true—that taken as a whole, the accepted economic instruments, regardless of the ideological perspective that shaped them, have not had a major impact on job creation—then perhaps the solution to unemployment is not primarily a matter of managing economic "processes" differently. Perhaps the problem of unemployment is fundamentally a question not of tinkering with the economic "mechanism" but of *values*. Indeed, I would argue that the solution to the grave problems of unemployment and poverty lies at the level of *values* and *paradigms*.

Let me explain. In my view, the dominant value-framework in our society is geared to individualistic self-interest and increased material gain as measured by an ever-expanding Gross National Product. Many people consider the expenditure of money as the measure of happi-

ness, and they often equate the "quality of things" with the "quality of life." This fundamental value or belief about life drives the profound changes taking place in today's production system. The apparent need to increase income and consumption in our already wealthy society causes us to find greater efficiencies in the production system, even if these efficiencies increase unemployment. The paradoxical conclusion is that the elimination of employment, however regrettable, serves our society's predominant value, namely increased income and consumption in a relentless pursuit of an ever-higher material standard of living.

Our incentive structures support such values. Think, for example, of the "employment factor" used in the formula for funding the Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance and many provincial health care plans. Why else do we tax *employment* (a social and economic benefit) instead of the *elimination of employment* (a social and economic cost)? Why do we financially reward companies which automate and reduce their workforce for the purpose of growth, and at the same time financially penalize companies which seek to preserve employment by placing on them a proportionately heavier tax burden? Why not tax in the reverse direction, based on the values not of individual self-interest and material gain but of human dignity and mutual responsibility, and thereby encourage the preservation and creation of jobs?

Fundamental values therefore lie at the heart of the issue. Indeed, as Premier Clark has pointed out, "Our job, our work, our profession, our vocation really defines who we are as individuals. We are defined by our work. (It is the second thing we ask someone we meet: First, what is your name? Second, what do you do?) Without it, life loses direction and meaning." The Premier continues in the same vein when he states that the challenges of jobs and job creation "go to the heart of what kind of society we have, not just in economic terms, but in terms of allowing individuals to realize their human potential"—and, I would add, the potential of the community.

Needed: A National, Non-partisan Effort

Given, then, the failure of past and present solutions, no matter where they lie on the ideological spectrum, given the pressing need for adopting life-sustaining values such as human dignity and mutual responsibility, and given the deepening human tragedy caused by poverty and unemployment, I strongly urge that poverty and unemployment become the focus of an intensive *national, non-partisan* effort and dialogue. Faith-communities, to the degree that they themselves

are actively seeking to alleviate poverty and unemployment, can contribute an important voice to this broad-based initiative, pointing out the "values-questions" and proposing, in concert with others from all sectors of life, viable public-policy alternatives based on alternative core values.

Surely, poverty and unemployment should be non-partisan issues. These gross injustices, which cause deep pain and have costly consequences, should not be subjected to partisan power-plays and ideological propaganda. Instead, this human suffering should cause our political parties, as well as our non-government institutions, organizations and faith-communities, to work together for the public interest[1] and the common good,[2] especially for the basic needs and the human rights of vulnerable neighbours.

This national, non-partisan effort should include the positive participation of all our governments as well as our social agencies, educational institutions, labour organizations, business federations—and faith-communities. As Premier Clark has put it, "we must have partnership among government, industry, labour and community leaders if we are serious about tackling this problem" (of "creating the best possible solutions, initiatives that will keep our province one of the most dynamic, productive and satisfying in the world to live [in]"). Again, as he emphasizes, "Government can't do everything"—nor should it! No sector can solve these grave socio-economic problems on its own. We must tackle this enormous challenge together. Persistent poverty and chronic unemployment are *structural* injustices that require *cooperative* action based on *communal* reflection throughout Canada.

In a recent Open Letter to Finance Minister Paul Martin I stated:

> Such an important initiative must address the purpose of economic activity (is it merely to maximize earnings?), the human rights and responsibilities of all who work, the role and limits of technology, the power and duty of the suppliers of capital, and, last but not least, the legitimate needs of present and future generations, our respect for the creation and our use of precious resources (Vandezande 1997, 6-7).

My questions to Mr. Martin included the following, and I will keep raising them until I get satisfactory answers and see concrete results: "(1) When the Liberals came to power in 1993, you set *deficit reduction* targets. When will you also set *poverty reduction* and *job creation* targets that would be treated as equally valid policy objectives and budget priorities? (2) In order to accomplish your commendable goal of reducing unemployment to five per cent, will you establish an in-

dependent, representative National Job Creation Commission that will help find equitable ways and means of achieving 'full employment'?" (Vandezande 1997, 6-7).

The Contribution of Faith-Communities

These concerns and questions clearly involve our faiths and values, our commitments and goals. They involve human dignity and community, mutual respect and responsibility, economic equity and social justice, and environmental integrity and fiscal fairness. Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ), a faith-based research and advocacy organization, has offered a detailed articulation of these values.[3]

CPJ views mutual respect as a way to justice, linking people and communities through bonds of equity and fairness. Likewise, we view mutual responsibility as a tie that binds, linking people and communities through deeds of compassion and solidarity. Moreover, CPJ's Guidelines for Socio-Economic Development are an attempt to convey and integrated view that seeks to be balanced and inclusive in the way we treat people, the environment, and resources.

I refer to these CPJ Guidelines to indicate that it is possible from a faith-perspective to articulate a value-framework that breaks with the individualism and materialism of laissez-faire capitalism as well as the tenets of other ideologies which violate the principles of justice, love, mutuality, and responsible stewardship.

CPJ is not alone in this effort. The following is from a speech which Daniel Ashini, Vice-President of the Innu Nation, gave to a Newfoundland and Labrador Environment Network Annual General Meeting in St. John's on July 12, 1996. His remarks are very much to the point:

> In Innu culture, we do not easily make distinctions between things like "jobs" and the "environment".... Out of our recent experience and our long history, many Innu are starting to challenge the assumptions that Europeans have made about us and the rest of the world for centuries. Even today, many people believe that the Innu will inevitably embrace "modern values" and become just brown-skinned Canadians on the march of "progress." Many people think that this is natural, that it is all part of the process of "development." Projects like Voisey's Bay are seen as steps down the path that will eventually bring the "backward" Innu into the modern world.
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> For Europeans, that path has meant choosing wage labour over traditional culture. In the modern, global economy, capital has become more important than labour, and high technology has largely replaced tradition and craftsmanship. Bigger is assumed to be better. But

> for me, one of the most objectionable parts of the modern economy is the way in which the land and water are seen as resources which need to be managed....
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> We find it hard to understand a system which considers fully functioning forests to be "wasted" and clearcuts to be good for the economy. Economies are just small parts of cultures, and even when they deny it, cultures are ultimately just small parts of ecosystems. The biggest mistake that human beings can make is to believe that they can reverse this natural order and make everything and everyone subordinate to "the economy"... (Ashini 1996).

Several denominations have also done excellent work. I would recommend, for instance, "Unemployment Isn't Working," a compassionate and comprehensive look at unemployment, and the "Report from the Work and Employment Task Group," both published by the United Church of Canada. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has also issued thought- and action-provoking statements.[4] They contain valuable insights and concrete suggestions for public policy makers. Other faith-communities can benefit from these churches' constructive contributions to the public dialogue. We need such a dialogue to help develop a more participatory and productive economy that respects the gifts and needs of people, the rights of the environment, and the limits of non-renewable resources.

In his speech, "Common Sense—God Sense," Rabbi Dow Marmur of Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto analyzed "The Common Sense Revolution" of the Ontario Government, and reminded his interfaith audience:

> Now, when we have sampled the bitter taste of "The Common Sense Revolution," many of us—defenders and detractors alike—will come to realize what we may have only surmised before: namely, that the document, and the way it is being implemented, will have far-reaching repercussions for the very fabric of our society. In many ways, the triumph of this document illustrates what happens to society when religion is relegated to the private realm, where God sense is banished from common sense.
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> And that is, of course, most emphatically a religious concern, relevant to all faiths. Which makes it our concern, yours and mine. In the best tradition of the Hebrew Prophets, which Jews share with their Christian neighbours, as religious leaders we are called upon to react the way Amos or Jeremiah might have reacted in similar circumstances. We must testify to the word of God, whether it is expedient or not (Marmur 1995).

All of these statements share the conviction that poverty and unemployment, hunger and homelessness, involve human beings and religious choices. The common good requires careful decisions based on core values that deal with fundamental concerns and questions of ultimate importance. These questions can and must be addressed in the spirit of our human calling to love our neighbours by doing justice, showing mercy, and walking humbly with our God (Mic. 6:9). The prophet Isaiah put the challenge this way: "Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow" (Isa. 1:17). In Psalm 82:3 we are reminded: "Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless, maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

These biblical imperatives are relevant to our life and decision-making today. To the degree that our faith-communities, governments, businesses, trade unions, educational institutions, and media recognize the plight of the poor, the hungry, the homeless, and the jobless; to the degree that we all defend their cause, maintain their rights, and help liberate them from oppression and exploitation by seeking justice and learning to do right; to the degree that we affirm life, build community, and practice solidarity—to that degree we help develop a healthy economy and a mutually responsible economy.

Faith-communities which take seriously their basic beliefs about the meaning of life, the purpose of work, the legitimate needs and human rights of denfenceless neighbours, will demonstrate that faith active in deeds of justice and mercy is alive and well. As the apostle James warns:

> Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him or her, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his or her physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:15-17).

The Scriptures make clear that a faith-motivated way of life is rooted in the reality that human life is God's precious gift (and is therefore entitled to protection and respect), and that human work is a unique way of expressing our humanity and contributing to our community.

When we take these directives seriously, then an integral faith-perspective has important implications for our economies and public policies. We need to live wisely and learn that enough is enough, is enough! The principle of "enough" applies as much to our personal lifestyle as our provincial economy, as much to our family budget as to our provincial budget. We urgently need an alternative way of eco-

nomic life that is *not* shaped by the modern obsession with the materialist rat-race and Gross National Product, the golden calf of our dollar-driven, market-dominated economies, fueled as they are by profit-maximization and power concentration. Measuring life and progress in terms of material prosperity and wealth is a value-laden judgement. It is also a dangerous reduction of human dignity and environmental integrity. It undermines the social fabric of the human community and threatens the fragility of the good creation.

Towards an Economy of Care

How then should we proceed? One of Canada's internationally-respected entrepreneurs, Maurice F. Strong, who served as Chairman of the Board of Petro-Canada and now serves as a key adviser to the United Nations' General Secretary, in a major address in 1978 to the Third International Conference on Man and His Environment—Our Future Options, rightly observed:

> Our commitment to continuous growth in gross national product is built right into the economic system by which modern industrialized societies function. It is based on the assumption that more is better, that the well-being of the societies can only be assured by continuous growth in the material sense. The expectations of consumers, the creation of employment, the incentives which motivate investors and managers, are all geared to this system in which material growth is the prime mover.

Mr. Strong then emphasized: "In industrialized societies *most of the valid needs as yet unsatisfied are of a non-material nature. But industry rarely searches these out as they do not accord with its traditional industrial logic*" (Strong 1978, italics his).

These prophetic remarks were made twenty years ago. They are as intensely relevant today! As Christian economists Bob Goudzwaard and Harry de Lange consistently advocate in *Beyond Poverty and Affluence*, we urgently need to move towards an economy of care. We need to realize that the foundations of our local, national and international economic order urgently require renewal based on responsible stewardship, on genuine care for the fragile earth and its vulnerable people. These authors rightly remind us that,

> the economic tasks of people and societies include more than simply producing and consuming; they also include *care*. Care is an authentic element of the oldest definitions of the Greek word *oikonomia*, or "economy." *Oikonomia* means the management (*nomos*) or care exercised by the economist, or steward (*oikonomos*) for the household (*oikos*) and for that within it.... Economic life consist of more than producing and consuming; it also consist of sustaining and keeping (Goudzwaard and Lange 1995, 56).

As we read in Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and *everything* in it, the world, and *all* who live in it." All people are created in God's image and called to reflect God's likeness in all of our activities. All of us are invited to be God's faithful stewards who have the responsibility to "take care" of God's good creation (Gen. 2:15). All of us are challenged to do this task as God's partners and trustees who are called to live in harmony and peace with the whole of creation; not as its adversaries and conquerors.

This framework of responsible stewardship is a guide *for* equitable and sustainable development and a guard *against* ruthless resource exploitation, limitless economic expansion, and endless material enrichment. It is a guide for integral, multi-dimensional growth that simultaneously advances human, social, and environmental well-being for present and future generations.

It is crucial that we think and act in ways that affirm life, build community, and practice solidarity. This must also become evident in our responsibilities as citizens and faith-communities. I welcome the British Columbia Government's commitment to "creating jobs, protecting medicare and education, and safeguarding our environment" (*Speech from the Throne* 1997, 26). However, this commitment does require us to shape politics and decision-making from an *integrated* understanding of life so we make coherent and consistent life-choices. We can do so by together pursuing the *integration* of faith, justice, love, mercy, mutuality, solidarity, and stewardship, both in our personal and community life and in the development and implementation of public policies.

An Example: Citizens for Public Justice

Let me give one example—and there are many—of a group of citizens from various faith-communities pressing for integration in public policy. As a non-partisan, ecumenical research and public-advocacy organization, Citizens for Public Justice promotes the practice of love for our neighbours, stewardship of the earth and its resources, and justice for all peoples and communities in Canadian public policy. These basic principles apply equally to all areas of public policy, whether economic, social, or environmental. All public policies must support the practice of equity, fairness, stewardship, and community, leading to human and environmental well-being.

In the context of our appearances before Parliament's Standing Committee on Finance, CPJ representatives have repeatedly stressed that a financial crisis may not be used as an excuse to abandon the vulnerable among us. An equitable and integrated approach to policy-

making must actively respond to all of the deficits—human, environmental, social, and fiscal.

This integration is absolutely essential in our divided world, which is so deeply influenced by individualistic ideologies and escapist theologies that *privatize* faith and *compartmentalize* decision-making. Faith-directives or core values are basic building blocks for a new, principled politics. They are guidelines for the development of new public policies that would emerge from a clear commitment to public justice for all and an active pursuit of the common good, for the environmental and human well-being of all people and all communities. Such a communal commitment and pursuit would include the consistent practice of *mutuality*, of *mutual respect* and *mutual responsibility*.

Our challenge is then to articulate the actual meaning of integration for public policy. Consider, as one example, what mutual respect and mutual responsibility, as building blocks for an integrated policy, mean for the urgent need to establish and preserve fiscal equity and socio-economic justice between and within generations and across Canada.

Equity *between* generations (inter-generational equity) means that we may not satisfy our own needs by impoverishing future generations. We must use Canada's public resources responsibly, so that they remain available to future generations. Equity *within current* generations (intra-generational equity) requires that we ask what we owe each other *today*. The obligation of the government to chart a sustainable future presumes an equal obligation towards those who are currently poor and deprived.

Justice requires us to ask whether people living in Canada today have the resources they need to live out their calling as God's people. Justice requires us to ask whether our neighbours have real access to worthwhile work, fair employment conditions, equitable income-security provisions, adequate education, health care, housing, and child care. Justice requires us to exercise our communal responsibility to use such resources carefully, and to do all we can to ensure the right of all persons and communities to full participation in the life and decision-making of our economy and society. Remember, justice is not spelled just-us!

The principle of *human dignity* requires us to treat all persons and their communities with justice, love, compassion, and respect. The principle of *mutual responsibility* requires all persons to contribute to the well-being of the community as they are able, and each community to contribute to the well-being both of all its members, regardless of their ability, and of those in the larger society.

These fundamental principles of *equity, justice, human dignity,* and *mutual responsibility* apply equally to the government. The budget is one of the ways the government can demonstrate its political commitment to these vital principles. The government can do so by consistently practicing *fiscal fairness*: the right of all persons, communities and institutions to fair fiscal treatment and the responsibility of all to contribute fairly for the well-being of all.

Approaches to Child Poverty and Job Creation

I was pleased to read in the 1997 *Budget Speech* that the British Columbia Government is increasing its support for working families with tax cuts, rate freezes, and a monthly Family Bonus as part of its attempt to fight child poverty in Canada (16). When fighting child poverty, it is crucial to remember that children live in families, that families live in communities, and that communities are part of this province and our country. So, British Columbia's and Canada's anti-poverty and job-creation strategies must recognize that people live in a seamless web of relationships and structures, all of which are shaped by our economic, educational, fiscal, political and social attitudes and actions. Therefore, when we address poverty and unemployment, we need a coherent, *integrated* approach to public policy that consistently affirms human dignity, builds community, and practices solidarity for the common good, with special concern for the human needs and rights of the poor and the powerless.

In the context of job creation, we all would do well to take seriously the "Report of the Advisory Group on Working Time and the Distribution of Work." This advisory group, which was chaired by Dr. Arthur Donner, an economic consultant, and represented the differing perspectives of business, labour, academia and community organizations, was asked by the then-federal Minister of Human Resources Development to assess whether and how shorter working time and a more equitable distribution of work could contribute to job creation. The eight members all agreed on twenty-four recommendations which are as relevant today as they were in December 1994. They include: "that the legislated standard work week be no longer than 40 hours per week in any jurisdiction" (#6) and "that employers be required to provide prorated benefits to regularly employed part-time employees" (#14).

I also want to mention the important research and advocacy being done by 32 HOURS: Action for Full Employment and the other members of the national Shorter Work Time Network. THIRTY-TWO HOURS is "committed to a reduction and redistribution of work time,

in pursuit of a more economically just and ecologically sound society with a high quality of life for all."

Tragically, there is growing evidence that more and more people in Canada are experiencing a serious loss of dignity and a real sense of futility when they cannot find jobs at decent wages and when they must rely on food banks and hostels in order to escape hunger and homelessness. In my own province of Ontario, for example, vulnerable neighbours must daily struggle to meet the basic human needs of their families, while high-income earners daily profit from the Ontario government's arbitrary reductions in its income tax rates. These discriminatory cuts were imposed at the expense of the poor and the unemployed, and are having a severe impact on the community services and social programs that are so essential to these vulnerable Canadians' survival and future. A tax give-away to the well-to-do at the expense of desperate neighbours is tainted money. I and many other Ontarians cannot accept such bribes with a clear conscience. My understanding of faith and justice rejects such life-threatening and community-destroying policies as violations of human rights, as heresies. These iniquitous policies abandon poor and powerless people. Instead, the Ontario Government should be protecting and supporting them, so that they can also experience human dignity and be free from material poverty.

Concluding Remarks

As I said at the beginning, I speak from my understanding of faith—a faith that does justice. I do so in the conviction that one's heartfelt beliefs and core values are not *extraneous* but *integral* to the fundamental problems confronting not only the government, but also the province's business, community, labour *and* spiritual leaders. All of them and all of us must accept and exercise our responsibility as citizens. Each person in his or her own vocation as well as each community and enterprise must become more creative participants in what we hope "leads to a continuing dialogue—and public reflection—on the choices facing government" (Clark 1997); choices surrounding not only poverty, unemployment, and the environment, but also racism, sexism, and the human needs and rights of our children and grandchildren. I accept Premier Clark's challenge and share his hope. And I respectfully urge all those who read this, especially the spiritual leaders and the media, to join the dialogue, the public reflection, and the action needed to promote full-fledged justice for all!

Endnotes

1. Citizens for Public Justice asserts: "Public justice characterizes the government's task. Public justice requires government to use power in an equitable way. Governments must be aware of the different needs of diverse people, communities and organizations and balance and promote their public claims so that each may have the freedom to fulfill their God-given calling and responsibilities without oppression either from the authorities or from one another" (Citizens for Public Justice's "Guidlines for Christian political services," II, A, 4).

2. The Catholic Health Association of Canada has articulated "the basic ethical principles involved in building a healthy economy and society" as follows: "According to the Church's social teachings, respect for the value and dignity of the human person lies at the centre of a healthy economy and society. Since all persons are made in the image of God, they have an inalienable right to the basic needs of life, namely, the right to adequate food, clothing, shelter, employment, education, healthcare, a clean environment and the right to participate in decisions affecting these rights." This is what is known as the principle of the common good. In effect, all persons in a given society should have, as fundamental human right, common access to, and use of, those resources, goods and services that make for a more fully human life. "All other rights whatsoever," the Church proclaims, "including those of property and free commerce, are to be subordinated to this principle" (CHAC Fact Sheet 4: "Ethical priorities, social policy statement").

3. See CPJ's "Guidlines for public justice" (Toronto: Citizens for Public Justice).

4. See "Ethical reflections on the economic crisis" (1993), "Widespread unemployment: A call to mobilize the social forces of our nation" (1993), and "The struggle against poverty: A sign of hope for our world" (1996).

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