

Violence in Australian Poverty: A Fundamentalist Age

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The lecture is held annually
in honour of the
St Vincent de Paul Society's founder,

Blessed Frederic Ozanam

1813-1853



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works



Fr Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM

A Short Biography

Fr Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM PhD, is a Marist priest who graduated in social philosophy from the University of St Thomas in Rome, Italy and in applied cultural/economic anthropology from the University of Cambridge, with post-graduate studies at Oxford University.

Formerly, Fr Arbuckle was a professor of applied cultural anthropology at the East Asian Pastoral Institute, Ateneo de Manila University in Manila, Philippines; he is Co-director of the Refounding & Pastoral Development Unit, New South Wales and a National Director of the Sisters of Charity Healthcare Service.

He has also been a consultant to healthcare systems in the United States, Canada, Ireland and Australia. Fr Arbuckle was the keynote speaker at the National Assemblies of the Catholic Health Association of United States (1995), Canada (1996) and Australia (1997). He is a National Board Director of the Sisters of Charity Health Service.

Fr Arbuckle is the author of many articles in reviews (including Health Progress) and books on leadership and cultural change. His most recent books are:

- Healthcare Ministry: Refounding the Mission in Tumultuous Times (2000);
- Dealing with Bullies: A Gospel Response to the Social Disease of Adult Bullying (2003); and
- Violence, Society and Church: A Cultural Approach (2004).

A message from the State President

Dear Friends,

I am honoured to be able to share with the wider community this the transcript from the ninth annual Ozanam Lecture which celebrates our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam's spirit and the charism of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

This year the lecture was delivered by Fr Gerald A. Arbuckle SM, Co-director of the Refounding & Pastoral Development Unit, NSW and the respondent was Julie Morgan, Promoter of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation for the Franciscan Friars.

Over 500 people attended St Francis' Church to hear the lecture, which is not designed as an academic exercise but as a device to raise community consciousness on a contemporary social justice issue.

I invite people of all beliefs and political views to read and contemplate this lecture and provide critical discussion that perhaps will contribute to this important social issue.

God bless you all.

Syd Tutton
State President – Victoria
St Vincent de Paul Society



Violence in Australian Poverty: A Fundamentalist Age

Fr Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM

Co-director of the Refounding & Pastoral Development Unit, NSW

One of the main limitations of conventional poverty research has been...diverting attention away from causal factors. Peter Saunders¹

Discussions of welfare reform or ways of tackling unemployment too often fail to address a broader problem: a problem in the way that people who are not poor think about those who are... Mark Peel²

Since even the most common men [sic] have souls, no increase in their material wealth will compensate for arrangements which insult their self-respect and impair their freedom. R.H.Tawney³

Introduction

One of the earliest memories I have of my father in New Zealand was his regular attendance at the meetings of the St Vincent de Paul Society in the local parish. Then there would be phone calls at night by other members seeking his practical help for someone. His quiet example inspired me with a passion for justice.

For this reason I am grateful to offer something small in return to your Society – an anthropologist's insights into the complexity and violence of poverty.

How a problem is defined and then explained powerfully affects what is actually done about it. Inaccurate perceptions of, and defective attitudes to, poverty invariably result in bad policies and practices that are harmful, even unjust, to people.

I suggest we turn to the ministry of Jesus Christ to discover an accurate perception of what poverty means, together with its multi-faceted violences. We all have incidents in the ministry of Christ that we particularly cherish. It might be the parable of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son.

For myself, however, I would choose the healing of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar. The episode uncovers the many faces of poverty, including the violence that accompanies it and the fundamentalism with which it is often legitimised by people in authority. Hence, the relevance of the scene to the theme of this lecture. The event also spectacularly describes Christ's deliberate efforts to confront the structural and cultural causes of poverty. Jesus took an unpopular political stand, in this incident and throughout his ministry, on behalf of people who are poor that would eventually lead to his death.

¹ Peter Saunders, *The Poverty Wars* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2005) 83. Saunders is professor of Social Policy, University of New South Wales.

² M. Peel, *The Lowest Rung: Voices of Australian Poverty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 10-11, 173.

³ R.H.Tawney, *Equality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964) 12.



People can become so imprisoned by their low income that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for many to break through its crushing circumstances

Now to describe the scene.

Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, is sitting by the roadside (Mark 10:46-52). Because of a particular type of blindness he has been cast out of society for he ritually endangers the clean. For his family and former friends he no longer exists. The blindness was like HIV for us in the 1980s – a reason to stigmatise and exclude the sufferers from society. The only identity he possesses is that of a beggar, a very precarious one indeed.

Jesus is passing by and Bartimaeus cries out for healing. The crowd do their best to silence him, 'but he only shouted the louder' (Mark 10:48). Poor people, especially those who are ritually unclean, must remain silent, accepting their fate, as it was falsely believed, as a punishment by God for their sins.

The crowd has followed Jesus and listened to his words on compassion and justice, but they remain blinded by their prejudice against people like Bartimaeus. Jesus will have none of this fundamentalist and violent nonsense. He calls Bartimaeus to his side and gently asks him what he desires: 'Rabunni, let me see again!' (Mark 10:51). Jesus actually listens to a poor person, contrary to the culture of his time.

This is the message of Bartimaeus: let me become again a full member of society, one who can freely contribute to society with a sense of pride and responsibility.

By speaking directly to Bartimaeus – a socially non-person – Jesus breaks through the political, cultural and structural barriers that entrap the blind man. By defying these stigmatising and discriminating walls, Jesus allows Bartimaeus to rediscover his ability to be and act like a human person with dignity.

The poverty that society imposed on Bartimaeus can be described under five multi-faceted and interconnected headings. There is:

1. Poverty as an Externally Reinforced Vicious Cycle of Deprivation
2. Poverty as Deprivation of Opportunities
3. Poverty as Stigmatising and Discriminating, with Racist Connotations
4. Poverty as Cultural Breakdown
5. Poverty as a Culture of Violence

The authorities and wealthy at the time of Bartimaeus would have been ignorant of these expressions of poverty, but not the victims. Bartimaeus would have been merely a statistic for the authorities of his time, just another bothersome beggar, the cause of his own misery. Nothing much has changed, has it! As in the time of Jesus, we have managed to render invisible both the people on the margins and the powers that hold them there.

We consider each expression of poverty in turn and apply them to the Australian scene, two thousand years after the physical, social, political, economic and spiritual healing of Bartimaeus.

1. Poverty as an Externally Reinforced Vicious Cycle of Deprivation

We know that between two to three and half million people are estimated to have incomes below the poverty line in Australia, according to the Senate Inquiry in 2004.⁴

People can become so imprisoned by their low income that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for many to break through its crushing circumstances. We speak of a cycle of poverty, simply because the factors referred to are inter-connected and self-perpetuating. The vicious cycle, in which poverty breeds poverty, occurs through time, and transmits its effects from one generation to another. There is no beginning to the cycle, no conclusion. A financially poor family leads to a poor diet, inadequate housing, limited access to health and educational facilities, unemployment and underemployment because of a lack of qualifications, reduced energy levels.⁵

Bartimaeus was ensnared in this cycle. He would have been suffering from a poor diet, the effects of unemployment, poor health, and reduced energy levels. Such is the lot also of thousands of Australians today.

Let us briefly review some factors in the Australian cycle of poverty.

Education

Educational needs in socio-economically depressed areas require significant input of finance and specialised staff, but in fact they get far less than they demand.⁶ A report by the New South Wales Government in April last year recorded that in the State's most disadvantaged and remote public schools there are 'disproportionate numbers of beginning teachers and experience high rates of teacher turnover.'⁷

Little wonder that children in these areas are poor school achievers.

Unemployment

The labour market has been so changed over the last two or three decades that we now speak of 'the working poor'. The percentage of full-time employees has been reducing, and the numbers of part-time and casual employees, whose pay and conditions of work are typically behind national averages, has been growing rather dramatically.

As Professor Jan Pakulski, University of Tasmania, notes, 'between the 1960s and 2002 the proportion

⁴ See P. Saunders, *op.cit.*, 2.

⁵ See G. A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for the Pastoral Worker* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990) 58.

⁶ Wicks, *op.cit.* 5.

⁷ NSW Government, 'Building on Strong Foundations', reported in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 April (2005) 6.



Fr Gerald A. Arbuckle addresses the audience at St Francis' Church, Melbourne.

of permanent full-time employees in the workforce shrank from about 90% to 61%, a massive drop in one generation.' Simultaneously, 'casual and part-time employment grew...'⁸

In addition to being poorly paid, casual and part-time workers find it difficult, if not impossible, to obtain loans for housing or other necessities.

Healthcare

Those living on low incomes are reported to have incidence of illness and poor health at much higher rates than people on high incomes.

2. Poverty as Deprivation of Opportunities

Poverty, however, is not to be measured only in low income terms and its material consequences. It should also be defined as the 'deprivation of opportunities' or simply 'capability deprivation'. That is, poverty prevents or obstructs people from participating as full members of our society.

For example, all have the right to work, to participate in society, and to grow intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. All people have responsibility for each other's well-being; everyone should have opportunities to meet their responsibilities and to contribute to society.⁹ But those who are trapped in a circle of poverty have a restricted range of choices available to them. Such was the fate of Bartimeus in the time of Christ. Such is the fate of thousands of Australians today.

Unless we look at poverty from this entrapping perspective, we will tend to blame the victim for the

poverty. Statements like 'the poor can themselves get out of poverty, if they truly want to' are dangerously simplistic.

Bob Carr, while Premier of New South Wales, commented on the riots at Macquarie Fields in late February last year. He laid the blame solely on the individuals concerned and denied that it was the fault of governments, which had thrown poor jobless people together in a rundown housing estate: 'I am not going to have it said that this behaviour is caused by social disadvantage.'¹⁰

3. Poverty as Stigmatising and Discriminating, with Racist Connotations

The third definition of poverty describes poverty from the perspective of the people who experience it.

When people are blamed as the cause of their own poverty they are being stigmatised by society. A stigma is a culturally recognised quality that is used by those who have power to differentiate and discredit others. The identification of the stigma, poverty in this case, is used to reduce the person from a complex whole, to a single, tainted and discounted trait, upon which all social interaction, by those with power with the person or group will be based.

The tragedy is made worse when those stigmatised begin to believe the negative stereotypes given them by the stigmatisers.

Those who are stigmatised feel pushed to the margin, considered of no importance, having nothing to

⁸ J. Pakulski, *Globalizing Inequalities: New Patterns of Social Privilege and Disadvantage* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004) 158.

⁹ See M. J. Bane, in (eds) M. J. Bane and Lawrence M. Mead, *Lifting Up the Poor: A Dialogue on Religion, Poverty and Welfare Reform* (Washington: Brookings Institute, 2003) 22-23.

¹⁰ Reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 March (2005) 1.



A people whose culture has been destroyed lose heart and energy, because a culture provides people with a sense of identity, belonging, self-respect.

contribute to society, worthless, of no credibility, even made to feel at times genetically inferior as human persons. Most of us would at some stage experience some of these feelings. But people who are stigmatised by society, eg people who are socio-economically poor, those mentally ill, are made to experience these feelings every day of their lives. Hence, a sense of fatalism, hopelessness, can grip them, as their sense of self-worth and self-respect disintegrate. You can sense this pain in the cry to Jesus by Bartimaeus: 'let me see again' (Mark 10:51).

Yet, human dignity cannot be subjected to endless indignities and remain intact. Little wonder if at times this sense of hopelessness can be catalysts for violent outbursts of frustration.

It is not insignificant that migrants from Lebanon in Australia have one of the highest jobless rates of any ethnic group. For Lebanese Muslims there is the further stigma of being members of a high-profile minority religious group, one that feels in danger in the contemporary security anxiety.¹¹

Look further at the Australian scene, at how quick governments and the public are to stigmatise people who are poor, at how the problem of poverty is reduced to blaming people on welfare. In January 2002, reports Mark Peel in his excellent book *The Lowest Rung: Voices of Australian Poverty*,¹² Melbourne's Herald Sun condemned four thousand welfare cheats, but failed to point out that this represented a minuscule fraction of those seeking benefits. Politicians have also played on the stereotype.

From history we know that when people are demonised they are quickly defined to be in some way or other innately inferior. This is racism. The categorisation legitimises governments to deny them their fundamental rights.¹³ Has this not happened in Australia to many asylum seekers in recent times? Think of the Tampa affair, when a Norwegian container ship was forcibly boarded and its asylum seekers removed to Nauru and Manus Island, Papua New Guinea.¹⁴ What of our infamous detention centres?

4. Poverty as Cultural Breakdown

A people whose culture has been destroyed lose heart and energy, because a culture provides people with a sense of identity, belonging, self-respect. Emotionally and psychologically they die and their physical health further disintegrates. 'Besides the streams of Babylon,' cried the Israelites in exile, 'we sat and wept at the memory of Zion' (Ps 137:1).

It is impossible to understand poverty among Aboriginal peoples today if we ignore the history of cultural genocide¹⁵ directed at them by successive

outsiders. [When British settlers first arrived here in 1788, they concluded that the country was equivalently terra nullius, a land without a people, that it was theirs for the taking.] We know what happened to Aboriginal peoples in consequence. Relationship to land is integral to their cultural identity, just as it is with Maori people in New Zealand. When Aboriginal peoples objected to what took place, they were killed or further pushed back into inhospitable parts of the country.¹⁶

5. Poverty as a Culture of Violence

Now to explain two key words in the title of this lecture – fundamentalism and violence – though we have been speaking about them throughout this lecture. Both words are rather slippery to define.

Fundamentalism occurs today as an authoritarian reaction to the fears of political, economic or religious chaos. Fundamentalism, argues Patrick Arnold, is 'an aggressive...movement which... seeks to return its...nation to traditional orthodox principles, values, and texts through the co-option of the central executive and legislative power of both...religion itself and the modern national state'.¹⁷ Fundamentalists – be they political, economic, religious – do not allow their beliefs to be questioned.

Violence is not about damaging or destroying things. It is about abusing people. Violence crushes the spirit of people and makes them submissive to violators for their purpose. It is not confined to physical violence. It is also the creation of cultural conditions that materially or psychologically destroy or diminish people's dignity, rightful happiness, and capacity to fulfil basic material needs.

The conscious or unconscious intention of those who control cultures can be to intimidate people on the margin into submission. I use the word 'unconscious', to stress the fact that a culture is a 'silent language'. People who claim to act rationally, to be motivated by the noblest intentions, can in fact be guided by movements or attitudes of which they are unaware.

What are some movements in our Australian culture that – at least unconsciously – intimidate people who are poor? Is there a fundamentalist ideology behind this intimidation?

I list three:

1. The fundamentalism of neo-capitalism or the new right
2. Political denial that poverty exists
3. The normalisation of violence

¹¹ See comments in editorial, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 December (2005) 12.

¹² See M. Peel, *The Lowest Rung: Voices of Australian Poverty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 172; Professor Peter Saunders, *The Poverty Wars*, op.cit., 95; R. Whyte, *Australia's Artful Dodger: Centrelink* (Wollongong: Welfare Watchdog Publications, 2005) 103 and passim.

¹³ See E. Kallen, *Social Inequality and Social Injustice* (New York: Palgrave, 2004) 32.

¹⁴ See S. Pietsch, 'Racism from Above or Below? Official Reactions to Jewish Refugees in the 1930s and the Tampa Affair', ed. J. Cogan and others, *Seeking Refuge: Asylum Seekers and Politics in a Globalizing World* (Wollongong: University of Wollongong Press, 2005) 97-117; J. Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) passim.

¹⁵ See a summary of the controversial use of the term 'genocide' by Bain Attwood, *Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History* (Sydney: Allen Unwin, 2005) 87-105.

¹⁶ See H. Reynolds, 'New Frontiers: Australia', (ed.) P. Havemann, *Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 129-140.

¹⁷ P. Arnold, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, ed. N.J. Cohen (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990) 174.



1. The fundamentalism of neo-capitalism or the new right¹⁸

Over the last 30 years there has been a revival of 19th century orthodox capitalism, which goes under a variety of titles, eg 'market capitalism', 'neo-classical capitalism', 'market liberalism'. Think of the behaviour of Mr Burns in that brilliant satire *The Simpsons* and you have a blunt summary of what these words mean. Neo-capitalism fits the definition of fundamentalism provided above by Patrick Arnold. Hence, today's market capitalism is called also 'market fundamentalism'.¹⁹

Market fundamentalism has become pervasive, its assumptions unquestioned by its supporters. Its ideological assumptions are: profit is the sole measure of value; sustained economic growth is the best way to distribute wealth; free markets, unrestrained by government interference, result in the most efficient use of resources; lower taxation for the wealthy and reduced government spending, especially in regard to people who are poor; the breaking-up of trade unions.²⁰ Public institutions must become pseudo-businesses.²¹ For example, healthcare is to be considered an economic commodity and must be subject to the principles of supply and demand in the marketplace. This ideology is spreading throughout the Western world.

Contained in the fundamentalist mythology of the neo-capitalist culture is the Social Darwinist

assumption²² that the poor are poor through their own fault and that the rich have a fundamental right to become richer. Assumptions that Jesus sought to condemn in his healing of Bartimaeus and in other incidents. Welfare services only make poverty worse and reduce the incomes of the wealthy, so they must be reduced. Hence, there has been the 'rolling back' of social and welfare services. Former welfare recipients become a new working poor, as is already particularly evident in the United States.²³

Market fundamentalists have adopted the post-modernist distrust of history. As social commentator John Ralston Saul comments: "we have come to so forget our own history that we are now compliantly acting in a suicidal manner, believing that economics can lead – where in the past it has always failed to do so...We have fallen in love with an old ideology that has never paid off in the past."²⁴

Australian Scene

Is this ideology having an impact on government decision-making in Australia? Peter Saunders, professor of Social Policy, University of New South Wales, would think so, and I agree. He argues that economic liberalism, despite all positive economic indicators, has contributed to an increase in unemployment, inequality, social dysfunction and alienation.²⁵

¹⁸ For a fuller development of the relationship between postmodernity and violence see Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004) 153-214.

¹⁹ For an interesting case study analysis of a fundamentalist relationship between neo-capitalism, religion and nationalism see Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 143-46 and passim.

²⁰ See S. Sim, *Fundamentalist World: The New Dark Age of Dogma* (London: Icon Books, 2004) 102-3; J. R. Saul, *The Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World* (London: Penguin, 2005) 15-6.

²¹ See C. Shore and S. Wright, 'Coercive Accountability', ed. M. Strathern, *Audit Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2000) 63-85.

²² See J. Wright, *The Ethics of Economic Rationalism* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2003) 123-37.

²³ J. Kapulski, *op.cit.*, 200.

²⁴ P.R. Saul, *The Unconscious Civilization* (Toronto: Penguin, 1997) 123.

²⁵ P Saunders, *op.cit.*, 57.



We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern.

Pope Benedict XVI

Australian health policy-makers have gradually shifted their concern from equity and social justice to cost containment and, more recently, to cost-effectiveness.²⁶

Note, for example, how the Federal Government has reneged on its pre-election promise not to interfere with Medicare and increase safety-net thresholds. The decision impacts especially on people who are poor.

The authoritarian attitude of the New Right is also obvious in its undermining of the role of trade unionism, in the unseemly haste in introducing anti-terrorism legislation,²⁷ and in its approach to penal policy. The emphasis is 'law and order' and political parties compete with one another in supporting this: increase control and insistence on more punishment, prisons, and police numbers while downplaying the rehabilitation of prisoners.²⁸ The introduction of mandatory sentencing, zero tolerance policies, the compulsory detention of asylum seekers, especially women and children in concentration-camp-like conditions – all aim at restricting the judgements of judges and social workers.

The populations particularly singled out as the most in need of control and retribution are the welfare poor, indigenous peoples, asylum-seekers, the unemployed, and marginalised working-class youth.²⁹

Little wonder, therefore, that some politicians blame Aboriginal peoples and their supporters for wanting to focus on Australia's racist past. The attempts to draw our attention to past oppression of indigenous Australians and its ongoing impact on their lives, according to the Prime Minister John Howard, are among 'the more insidious developments in Australian political life over the last decade.'³⁰ He has condemned what he refers to as the 'black armband version' of Australia's history. Tragically, as history repeatedly shows, a democracy cannot survive if the rights of its most vulnerable are consistently ignored.

2. Political denial that poverty exists

The cultural myth of social and economic equality in Australia continues to be perpetuated by successive governments and the media. If inequality is referred to, it is generally seen as the victim's problem and not a multi-faceted cultural issue, as explained above.³¹

Moreover, the acknowledgement of poverty does not attract votes, so politicians significantly ignore it. Professor Peter Saunders comments: 'The official response to poverty research has been to ignore it, to deny the existence of poverty or to argue that the measurement ambiguities make estimates of poverty arbitrary and thus of no use for policy.'³²

²⁶ See H. Swerissen and S. Duckett, 'Health Policy and Financing', (ed.) H. Gardner, *Health Policy in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997) 33.

²⁷ See concerns raised in open letter from the Law Council of Australia, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 December (2005) 13.

²⁸ See (eds) D. Brown and M. Wilkie, *Prisoners as Citizens: Human Rights in Australian Prisons* (Sydney: Federation Press, 2003) xix-xx.

²⁹ See Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church*, op.cit., 172-3.

³⁰ J. Howard, *Thomas Playford Memorial Lecture*, Adelaide, 5 July (1996) 1. Quoted by H. Reynolds, op.cit., 129.

³¹ See A. Greig, F. Lewis and K. White, *Inequality in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 94.

³² Saunders, *The Ends and Means of Welfare*, op.cit., 143.

³³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 October (2002) 12.

³⁴ See D. Hayward and B. Kliger, *Breaking the Nasty Habit? Gaming Policy and Politics in the State of Victoria* (A Report Commissioned by the InterChurch Gambling Taskforce), 2000.

³⁵ In 2002 approximately 13% of the total Victorian Government income came from poker machines. See www.salvationarmy.org.au/media/2002/02/02424

This governmental denial encourages we Australians to become almost silent about poverty, unless it is related to something called 'the welfare receiver problem'.

3. The normalisation of violence

Walter Wink, a social and scriptural commentator, pinpointed a tragic reality of our times: 'Violence is accorded the status of religion and it, not Christianity, is the real religion... Violence is presumed to be the only and ultimate means to security [and dominance of power].' When we accept this without question, then we also overlook the social and economic violence that poverty imposes on people who are poor. We just take it for granted.

Consider the Australian scene. For example, the manipulated vilification and stigmatising of anonymous refugees for political advantage, as occurred in the children-overboard incident in 2001, was a particularly nasty form of violence. Yet the government was well-supported in its actions.

As the editorial of the *Sydney Morning Herald* commented, 'Most Australians... [were] not greatly troubled by the distortions and deceptions the Government resorted to... This is a great pity... [In] a democracy any lie is poison to the system, slow-acting perhaps, but dangerous nonetheless... [The truth's] manipulation is especially insidious when it feeds racism, xenophobia and prejudice.'³³ Little wonder that the violence inflicted by poverty fails to touch the conscience of many Australians.

Consider, finally, the normalisation of violence against people who are poor that occurs in parts of Australia, because of the gambling policies of governments.

Indirect taxation through poker machines falls excessively on people who are poor. A disproportionate share of problem gamblers are also drawn from the lower socio-economic sections. And the disadvantaged socio-economic geographical areas are particularly targeted by the companies owning these machines.³⁴ Since the governments concerned gain so much financially from gambling revenues, they are not likely to radically change their policies in favour of people who are poor, unless there is public pressure to do so.³⁵

Conclusion

Frederic Ozanam struggled for justice in a world of market fundamentalism that has re-surfaced in our own time.



Ozanam Lecture 2006 with guest lecturer, Fr Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM.

He understood the five expressions of poverty in the story of Bartimaeus. He was also guided by the way Jesus reacted to Bartimaeus.

Firstly, Jesus by his attitude and action reassures Bartimaeus is a person of dignity. He empowers Bartimaeus not to accept any longer the cultural stigma that those who are poor must remain silent.

Secondly, Jesus actually asks Bartimaeus what he would like: "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51). Thinking about justice begins by listening to those who know about injustice.³⁶

Thirdly, following Jesus Christ and his healing of Bartimaeus Frederic believed that the healing of poverty must be wholistic – social, cultural, economic, spiritual. Charity without the pursuit of justice is not wholistic.

Wholistic care requires professional competence, said Pope Benedict XVI recently, but it is not of itself sufficient he insists. 'While professional competence is a primary fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern.'

I applaud the St Vincent de Paul Society of Australia for the courage to believe this and implement it, despite the condemnations of those who feel their fundamentalist views about economic reform are threatened.

These are the abiding lessons of the interaction between Jesus and Bartimaeus. And integral to Frederic's story and your own.

Finally, in James Derum's life on Frederic, I was struck by this comment: 'Passion, prejudice, and ignorance prevent most [people] from seeing a current historical situation in perspective; Frederic Ozanam was one of the few in his time who was able to do so.'³⁷ How true of the 19th century! How true also of the 21st century!

Frederic was an action-oriented academic. He used his academic skills to identify the forms of violence against people who were poor, constantly alerting those around him to what they had become culturally blinded to see.

There is also a vital place the same action-oriented academics among you today. I already see the fruit of their work in your publications. Encourage them. Let the talents you have in your midst – academic, pastoral, practical – continue to inspire us to be prophetic in imitation of your prophetic founder.

The prophet Isaiah cries out at one point:

'Violence will not be heard within your walls, but only healing, not devastation and sadness within your boundaries' (Is 6:18)

These words inspired Frederic. So also you his successors. The soul of this nation urgently needs your healing message in an atmosphere of violence and fundamentalism.

³⁶ M. Peel, op.cit., 11.

³⁷ J.P. Derum, *Apostle in a Top Hat* (St Clair: Fidelity Publishing, 1960) 170.



Julie Morgan

A Short Biography

Julie Morgan is the Promoter of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation for the Franciscan Friars in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia. In this role Julie is responsible for managing a range of welfare and advocacy projects for the Franciscans such as refugee centres in Australia and food security projects in East Timor; she is engaged in a variety of national and international advocacy initiatives including issues such as 'the right to development', trafficking and West Papua; and she conducts multi-level social justice and human rights education throughout Australia and also South East Asia.

Prior to working with the Franciscan Friars, Julie worked as the Deputy National Director for Caritas Australia and so worked across the overseas and local programs but had a particular focus on Cambodia, East Timor, Rwanda and Bougainville. She still retains an involvement with Caritas but at the international level as she does part-time consultancy for Caritas International conducting training in conflict analysis and peace building for Caritas' humanitarian staff in various parts of the world and was recently in the Middle East for a Caritas peace building workshop.

Julie is currently co-ordinating a project for the Franciscan non-government organisation – called Franciscans International – which will assist them in the development of a regional human rights training and advocacy office for Asia and Pacific.

Julie is a secondary school teacher by trade and taught in a number of Victorian Catholic secondary schools. As well as qualifications in teaching, counselling and non-government organisations management, Julie holds degrees in theology, and philosophy and is currently doing a PhD part-time in human rights and social ethics at the University of New South Wales.

Response to Fr Gerald A. Arbuckle's Ozanam Lecture

Julie Morgan

Promoter of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of
Creation for the Franciscan Friars

It is a great pleasure to be asked to return to my home town of Melbourne, sporting capital of the world, and a great privilege to be asked to respond to Gerry Arbuckle's thought-provoking paper given for the 2006 Ozanam Lecture.

Tonight I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, the Wurundjeri people, I pay profound respect to them, and I hope that their struggle for recognition, justice and liberation is strengthened by our gathering here tonight.

For several years in the 1990s before I left Melbourne I worked beside others on the Vinnies Friday night soup van, and so to be here tonight to speak with you is indeed a great honour. So much of what is great about the Catholic community in Victoria and Australia has been because of the sometimes quiet, sometimes noisy, always persistent voice of the St Vincent de Paul Society speaking out on behalf of the people on the streets whose voices are rarely heard. For all that you have taught me and others about generosity and fidelity, I thank you.

Gerry Arbuckle's paper is shot through with a wealth of information and analysis, spirituality and concern, all of which helps us to understand poverty by lifting what I refer to as the five veils or layers that conceal the face of the 'Other' who is poor in Australia. Gerry's research is woven together with penetrating insights into the causal nature of the way we who are not poor actually think poverty and think the 'Other' who is poor.

From the perspective of the anthropologist, Gerry's research invites us to analyse our thinking and to grapple, indeed wrestle to the point of getting a dislocated hip, with the crushing modalities of structural, racial and inter-generational poverty; yet his research challenges us to see not only the veils of poverty but to understand that every poverty trap in Australia is yet another demonstration and expression of the deep violence underlying the fundamentalist ways that the dominant culture in our society thinks the 'Other'.

Gerry gives us lots of information – and information is vital for those of us who share his work and spirituality, but my question is: what do we do with this information? How does it move us to action? How does it shape our programs and projects? Does the information and analysis indicate ways forward for individuals and organisations wanting to engage both with Bartimaeus and with Jesus? By making a distinction between Bartimaeus and Jesus I want to draw our attention to two dimensions of the St Vincent de Paul Society's work with the poor: firstly there is a deep human engagement with the oppressed, motivated simply by looking into Bartimaeus' face and wanting to remove that which keeps him entrapped, followed by the engagement with the poor which is a natural consequence of

CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



falling in love with Jesus. Both levels of engagement are tangible within the work of the Society and both are, I think, at play tonight as we listen to Gerry peel back the veils of poverty and feel ourselves moving ever more deeply into an authentic and liberating encounter with the 'Other'.

The framework through which I've listened to Gerry's paper comes from the Canadian Jesuit philosopher Bernard Lonergan. Now often when people hear the name Bernard Lonergan there is a deep, involuntary shudder as he can come across as extremely inaccessible (once when a group of his students in South Boston tried to talk to him about how they could get involved in working with the poor and solving poverty traps, he looked at them and said, well that's all very well in practice but will it work in theory?) However, this theory of his is workable and it will sound familiar to all those brought up on the Cardign method of see, judge, act. I have used this simple framework to think about, design, construct and evaluate a range of programs at local, national and international levels so I know it's very workable, very user-friendly.

The framework suggests to us that we must first be attentive to what is happening around us, that is, open our eyes, look at the information provided by Gerry and by other scholars and practitioners working with the marginalised in Australia and see what's actually happening. And this, I think, is Gerry's finest achievement tonight – he has presented us with an extraordinary array of information to which we must be attentive.

Becoming attentive to the veils of poverty is the first step, but then the next is to be intelligent about what we have just heard. This will mean, for example, that we're not satisfied with mere glimpses into the suburbs but we want to see more, know more, understand more deeply what causes inter-generational poverty, and what lies behind the cultural biases towards violence, and we will want to come to grips with the fundamentalist tendencies of those who hold power whether that be economic or ecclesiastical power.

Being attentive means we will realise that there are two very different discourses operating in this country, one blaming welfare cheats and the other lauding wealth creation, and then being intelligent suggests that we will actively listen to those different discourses and we will ask questions which pierce the surface to look for what they reveal and what they conceal.

In philosophy we refer to such techniques as deconstructive, that is, deconstruction suggests that we should not simply accept the given but always ask, 'whose voice is not being heard?' While the language of deconstruction might not be familiar (and is often dismissed by George Pell and John Howard) the basic technique of post-modernism and deconstruction is indeed very familiar to us today through the intervention in the game of cricket of the 'third umpire'. The third umpire makes us feel comfortable (or not!) about decisions because even though we have two umpires just there, right there, we now accept that those two people can't tell us the whole story of what's really going on. The Australian cricketing



To be fair means being reflective and decisive about the lexicon of violence and exclusion...

public is intuitively correct in knowing that the third umpire gives us a different perspective on what's happening; and instead of decrying this it might be better to be grateful that Australians are returning to a deep seated belief that has moulded this country from the start: that every level of authority must be questioned.

Being intelligent, as Gerry indicates in his paper, means that we will hear the much touted unemployment statistics and ask what they conceal: precarious underemployment which will now be exacerbated by the deceptively entitled 'Work Choices' legislation. Being intelligent will mean that when the government points one way: see how those parents throw their children overboard, or see what marvellous 'choices' lay before you in the workplace, or see how those Muslims want to destroy the country that they've chosen to come too... that we will deliberately turn in the other direction to examine what it is that they want to conceal. Now we need guidance and leadership in this activity and at this level of consciousness; we need third umpires, because to risk being intelligent requires courage. To take the risk of turning our gaze away means that we risk, even for a brief moment, losing our footing. And the fear of losing our way is what this government has sold us so very, very well. So our next intelligent question becomes: who will lead us from ignorance, fear and isolation and help us become the people we are truly meant to be?

The questions we ask ourselves about leadership naturally merge into the next step in the framework, that is, to be reflective, and to be reflective implies being decisive. Gerry's paper points in this direction when after presenting the information he then proposes that we go deeper, that we reflect on the sources of our thinking, that we reflect on what the experience of poverty is like from the inside not just what it's like from the outside. But reflection is an intrinsically dangerous level of consciousness because it's here we start to feel the pain of the 'Other', it's here that we start to realise, disturbingly, that as followers of Jesus, if we ourselves are not on the margins then we're taking up too much room. It's this reflective step which propels us to be decisive, to make decisions, often radical ones like those made by Jesus of Nazareth, Francis of Assisi and Frederic Ozanam, to not only announce the good news to the poor – that they will be poor no more – but to identify oneself with the tax collector, the sinner, the woman, the outcast.

Again, in a strange kind of way, we Australians can tap into something that is already a deeply ingrained aspect of our culture if only we'd get back in touch with it. We intuitively know I think that one must be decisive if one is to be fair. It's this readiness to be decisive which has been put colloquially by the

Australian Tourist Commission recently: 'where the bloody hell are you?' So, where are we? For example, Gerry indicates that recently we've seen the factors of poverty coalescing and erupting violently in some of Sydney's suburbs. He names a few of the places and we could probably rattle them off easily now – Macquarie Fields, Redfern, Cronulla – but we must be extremely careful that these place names do not enter the lexicon of violence in Australia in the way that Port Arthur and Hoddle Street have become synonymous with destruction and death. Gerry's paper carries an implicit challenge for us as church for the stark reality is that we have more Catholic religious communities, schools, and churches in Cronulla and Maroubra than we have in Macquarie Fields. Yes Bob Carr was wrong to lay the blame on the victims of systemic exclusion but we have to ask ourselves as church, where the bloody hell are we?

And the final step is to be responsible, that is, to respond to the information and analysis that has been presented to us, and to act on the decisions stirred within us; and this is the challenge that is ever before the St Vincent de Paul Society. Gerry implies in his paper that to be moved to action by the situation of indigenous Australians who have been excluded and demeaned at every turn in our history means one thing: to learn from our history in order to include indigenous people. In Caritas' peace-building work we speak of this in terms of creating spaces for safe and respectful dialogue, spaces of inclusion not exclusion, where all sides in a conflict can be safe to speak their truth, and where, in time, healing can occur so that a better future can be actively not accidentally constructed.

Gerry's paper, in its conclusion, alludes to three ways of being responsible and he returns to the encounter between Bartimaeus and Jesus; personal, cultural, political engagement with the poor comes about when we seek to empower, to listen, and to include those who have been marginalised. The implication is clear: responding practically to people on the margins will mean profound change for them – and for us. However, having spent time in places like Rwanda and Cambodia I think they might be further down the track than we are in Australia, for it seems that their crises have fired their maturity to the extent that they can look into their past, and acknowledge their shame, whereas we seem locked into failure, unwilling to come to grips with the depth of our disgraceful conduct and unwilling to humbly seek forgiveness from indigenous Australians. But once again, if we have the eyes to see and the heart to feel, we realise that the scripture mirrors the reality of indigenous people in that the very real wounds of the crucifixion,



St Vincent de Paul Aged Care & Community Services' Board Chair, Pamela Macklin addresses the audience.

wounds which remain visible for Thomas to see and touch, are transformed in the resurrection – but not removed. We cannot simply forget that wounds have been inflicted, and that these wounds keep being opened generation after stolen generation, nor can we expect that our good intentions now will make everything right; if only we would look into the faces and into the wounds of indigenous Australians we would learn so much about life and suffering and about the God who want us to be free.

And it is in this fourth level of consciousness, being responsible, where the biggest invitation rests. And it's an invitation which is implied throughout Gerry's analysis of the violence of poverty in Australia which I wish to explore in more detail. For if Gerry is correct, and I think we are all in agreement that he is, we must act together responsibly in order to make the wrongs right. But we need more details.

Firstly, I think we – the St Vincent de Paul Society, Caritas, Franciscans International and the other actors in civil society – must be actively involved in growing a culture of conversation and that means demonstrating participation and inclusion, knowing as we do that culture cannot be changed through legislation but only through conversation between people. Gerry has shown us that the dominant culture of this country is hell bent on supporting every activity and mind set that lends itself to widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

To change that culture, and the parallel culture that has increased absolute poverty around the world, means that we must create conversations of respect and support, conversations of defiant bravery and quiet resistance. This conversation is the responsibility of everyone but the special part of non-government organisations if the conversation is to speak and act values whether they are theological, religious or human values (or all three) and to speak and act these values boldly, persuasively and authentically. Speaking and acting according to deep values tends, I believe, to bring people into conversations whereas fundamentalists, whether economic or ecclesiastic, speak and act according to fixed doctrines and dogmas that are the exclusive domain of specialists and experts. So the discourse that we in civil society want to be involved in and become champions of will speak the values of truth, freedom and compassion, and our programs will demonstrate that social justice, equity of participation and social empowerment are possible. And, what's more, we will keep on speaking and acting in this way until the culture begins to change in favour of the poor. It might take a while but we must believe that we can change this dominant culture through preferring and privileging the poor.

Secondly our invitation at this moment in time is to lift our vision beyond our nation and to align everything we do in Australia within the internationally recognised human rights structures and mechanisms that were established at the end



The voice of international human rights advocates is amplified when they can use the language and examples of the work of the Society in its defence of the poor in Australia.

of World War II in order to reverse the personal, religious, cultural and political thinking about the 'Other' that resulted in unspeakable demonisation and death. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights is a vision of the human person with which Catholic social justice non-government organisations and the Catholic community in general should be proud of, we should resonate deeply with its aims, and we should be doing all in our power to integrate its objectives into our workplaces, our programs, and our conversations. While the United Nations isn't perfect, unlike the Catholic Church, it is all we've got and we would do well to work within its dynamics to make it even better than it is now. Such is the challenge of 21st century responsibility.

So it is imperative that we become conversant with a rights-based approach to every aspect of human life within community, including access to clean and affordable water, access to worlds best practice local healthcare and education, and access to and participation within the three levels of decision-making and policy making structures of government in this country.

A human rights based approach to poverty reduction is more than just a legal framework of agreed minimum standards, it helps non-government organisations like the St Vincent de Paul Society, Caritas and Franciscans International to examine the patterns of power that operate in a globalised market place, in order to search out and capitalise on the connectors between people and groups, so that we might also search out and neutralise the dividers between people and groups. Adopting this international language is critical at this time in our history as complying with internationally agreed standards and articulating them at home and abroad helps us to resist the government as it does everything in its power to erode the edifice and influence of the United Nations. And once again we see the same techniques at play: the government points over there hoping that we'll be distracted enough not to notice as it goes around the corridors of Geneva and New York saying that Australia has worlds best practice in the treatment of refugees; and it points over there hoping that we will be distracted enough not to notice the vote at the United Nations in March 2004 when Australia was only one of three countries in the world which voted against the Right to Development; or in plain English, our government voted against the right of people to have food and water (the other two countries were, if I remember correctly, the United States and Japan, while Israel abstained). They are allowed to get away with these things when we allow ourselves to be distracted from the vision offered by the Universal Declaration on Human

Rights and when we don't use the language and standards of the subsequent covenants, treaties and conventions that the government has signed on our behalf. Surely the St Vincent de Paul Society amplifies its voice when it joins with those who speak about poverty and development on the international stage. And surely the voice of international human rights advocates is amplified when they can use the language and examples of the work of the Society in its defence of the poor in Australia.

It is only in adopting a rights-based approach to poverty reduction that we begin to move away from thinking about the poor in terms of our charity, and where we begin to think creatively about programs that build people and build communities. It is only in becoming more and more familiar with a rights-based approach to refugees, to indigenous people, to people with HIV or mental illness, to people on the fringes of our housing estates and within the boarding houses of our cities, that we can resist the temptation of looking there when the government wants to conceal a reality here that we should look at, realities that should be examined deeply, intelligently, and compassionately.

To conclude: being attentive, being intelligent, being reflective and being responsible about what we've heard tonight will mean committing ourselves to growing a culture of conversation that is injected with values and based on the indivisible human rights of every person in our community but especially of the poorest and most marginalised. And it will mean that, with Jesus of Nazareth, Francis of Assisi, and Frederic Ozanam, we will be prepared to look into the face of the 'Other' and we will consciously and actively privilege the 'Other'.

This is the only approach that will mark our programs, whether they are research and advocacy programs, fundraising and education programs, or service delivery programs, as different. This is the only approach that will mark our programs and not just our rhetoric as effective in removing the veils of poverty which mask the face of the poor. This is the only way that we begin to demonstrate that the values of truth, freedom, peace and inclusion are the foundations of the deep social compassion with which Jesus beckons us to move beyond social welfare and beyond social justice.

Thank you.



St Vincent de Paul Society International Vice President, Michael Thio closed the evening and thanked both speakers for their inspirational addresses.

Ozanam Lecturers and Respondents

- 1997 Sir James Gobbo**
Governor of Victoria
Respondent: Betti Knott, General Secretary, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria Inc.
- 1999 Archbishop (now Cardinal) George Pell**
Archbishop of Melbourne
Respondent: John Moore, National President, St Vincent de Paul Society
- 2000 Sir Gerard Brennan**
Chief Justice, High Court of Australia
Respondent: Susan Campbell, General Secretary, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria Inc.
- 2001 Betti Knott**
Director Operations, Archbishop of Atlanta, United States of America
Respondent: Tony McCosker, Director, Ozanam Community
- 2002 Professor John Molony**
Professor of History and Author, Australian National University
Respondent: Morag Fraser, Editor, Eureka Street
- 2003 Helen Johnston**
Director, Combat Poverty Agency, Ireland
Respondent: Fr Mark Raper, Provincial, Australian & New Zealand Province of the Jesuits
- 2004 Fr Frank Brennan SJ**
Associate Director, UNiYA and Author
Respondent: Sr Libby Rogerson, Co-ordinator of Social Justice & Director of Caritas, Diocese of Parramatta
- 2005 Moira Kelly AO**
Executive Director, Children First Foundation
Respondent: Fr Peter Norden, Policy Director, Jesuit Social Services
- 2006 Fr Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM**
Co-director of the Refounding & Pastoral Development Unit, NSW
Respondent: Julie Morgan, Promoter of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation for the Franciscan Friars



(l to r) The Society's International Vice President, Michael Thio, guest lecturer Fr Gerald A. Arbuckle SM, respondent Julie Morgan, Society State President – Victoria, Syd Tutton and St Vincent de Paul Aged Care & Community Services' Board Chair, Pamela Macklin.

Ozanam Lecture

The annual Ozanam Lecture celebrates the spirit of our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and the charm of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Frederic Ozanam wrote:

"Yours must be a work of love, of kindness, you must give your time, your talents, yourselves. The poor person is a unique person of God's fashioning with an inalienable right to respect.

"You must not be content with tiding the poor over the poverty crisis: You must study their condition and the injustices which brought about such poverty, with the aim of a long term improvement."

The lecture is open to the public and welcomes all interested individuals. Each year a guest lecturer is invited to address an audience and raise their community consciousness on a contemporary social justice issue.

The selected lecturer is a person actively involved in practical work with the disadvantaged and marginalised (those God loves most). But is also an advocate for social justice through their words or examples. This is to reflect the charisma of our founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam and his companions and our patron, St Vincent de Paul.

The Society has been privileged to have a distinguished list of lecturers and respondents over the past nine years. We are grateful to all for sharing their experiences while also raising the social consciousness of us all to our obligations in continuing to journey along Frederic Ozanam's vision.



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

The St Vincent de Paul Society began in 1833 with a 20 year old French university student named Frederic Ozanam. At that time the people of France were experiencing tremendous political and social upheaval including the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and unjust employment practices.

Ozanam gathered a group of colleagues and began responding in practical ways to the poverty and hardships he saw around him by visiting people in their homes, offering friendship and practical support such as a load of wood. Today this practice of 'home visitation' still remains a core activity of the St Vincent de Paul Society's members and volunteers.

The Society in Australia was founded by Fr Gerald Ward at St Francis' Church, Lonsdale Street, Melbourne on 5 March 1854. There are now over 44,000 members and volunteers assisting over 1.8 million people in need. The Society is one of the largest and most cost-effective welfare organisations in Australia.

In Victoria the St Vincent de Paul Society consists of over 7,000 members and volunteers who assist more than 660,000 people in need each year. The specialist arm of the Society, St Vincent de Paul Aged Care & Community Services, provides professional assistance to people with more complex needs in aged care, accommodation and support services as well as supported employment for people with a disability.

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