



O Lord, our Lord,  
how glorious is your name over all the earth!  
You have exalted your majesty above the heavens.  
When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and stars which you set in place—  
What is man that you should be mindful of him  
or the son of man that you should care for him?  
You have made him little less than the angels,  
and crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have given him rule over the works of your hands,  
putting all things under his feet.

—PSALM 8:2; 4-7

## **Reflection Paper on Becoming Friends & Prophets of God, Question # 8 (from the Blue Sheet)**

**“Name some social, economic, political, religious, and ecological injustices today that demand a prophetic response. How am I responding to the issues prophetically?”**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION:**

Prophetic response to issues of injustices is unpopular as it questions the comfortable and pleasure-seeking assumptions of popular culture; it challenges the authority of the government when it becomes corrupted, violent, or abusive. That was why the government of El Salvador assassinated Archbishop Oscar Romero as they were afraid of his authority in challenging their political oppression. Nevertheless, the faith community has the moral responsibility to make justice as number one priority.<sup>1</sup> The study to follow examines social, economic, political, religious, and ecological injustices today and proposes prophetic responses to the issues.

## **2. SOCIAL INJUSTICES:**

Human trafficking is a form of modern day slavery in which people, mostly women and girls, are abducted, deceived or coerced into situations of forced labor. Trafficking occurs in unregulated and unprotected labor sectors including agricultural and industrial production, domestic service and sex industry. The root causes of trafficking include poverty, violence and political conflict. Families living in absolute poverty often lack the means to feed all of their children; parents may decide to sell one or more of their children because they cannot afford to raise them. In many places especially in Asia, females are considered less valuable than males, and thus are more likely to be sold. Violence in the home, often linked to economic instability, can also make women and children more vulnerable to trafficking. Fearing for their safety, women and children often run away from situations of domestic violence. In search of shelter and food, they may become targets of trafficking agents who deceptively offer them security. Traffickers also take advantage of the desperate conditions created by wars, preying upon those living in refugee camps.<sup>2</sup>

The U.N. estimates that one to four million people are trafficked worldwide each year. In 2005, the International Labor Organization estimated that there were 9.5 million victims of forced labor in Asia alone.<sup>3</sup> In 2006, Cambodian police estimated that more than 50,000 girls were in brothels through Cambodia, many of whom were Vietnamese trafficked to Cambodia for sexual exploitation. The World Human Rights Organization and UNICEF estimate that one-third of the prostitutes in Cambodia are under the age of 18, the majority of whom are Vietnamese.<sup>4</sup>

**2.1 PROPHETIC RESPONSES:** As Christians, we believe God created us in His image (Gen 1:26-27) and made us little less than a god (Psalm 8:5-7) and therefore the modern day slavery is a grave sin against God. Pope Paul VI at Vatican II counsel condemns any form of slavery: "All violations of the integrity of the human person ... all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary

imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where men are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons; all these and the like are criminal; they poison civilization .. and militate against the honor of the creator" (Gaudium et Spes, no. 27). As disciples of Jesus, this compels us to act now to stop human trafficking and to raise awareness about the issue of trafficking and serve the victims. We need to join existing organizations such as "the Coalition of Catholic Organizations Against Human Trafficking which has over twenty national and international Catholic organizations united to eliminate the scourge of human trafficking, through public education, advocacy, and services."<sup>5</sup> Specifically, we need to reach out to families who have suffered domestic violence by providing food, fundraising or collecting clothing for a domestic violence shelter or volunteering at a shelter. We need to send aid to a community, rebuilding after a war and help refugee families fleeing conflict to resettle. We as the church need to raise awareness by training leaders and teachers to identify domestic violence and advocate public policy by writing letters to legislators about the issues of immigration and human trafficking.

### **3. ECONOMIC INJUSTICES:**

The economic policies that the U.S. enforces around the world benefit powerful interests and bring wealth to American society and to an increasingly narrow group of people, at great cost of others, their lives, well-being, and human rights. With the stock market crisis of 2002, some of the corrupt business and accounting practice was revealed.<sup>6</sup> The Enron scandal serves as a prime example; the loss of Enron jobs and countless life-time saving retirement funds showcased the crippling effect that corrupt business has on the hard-working American.

Poverty has brought the destruction of lives as economies shifted to favor free trade agreements and the repayment of punishing debt through World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies.<sup>7</sup> The largest flows of capital from wealthy nations are channeled into the exploitative control of capitalism and militarism and away from humanitarian concerns such as providing for the basic needs, education, and rights of the world's population. When a nation spends more on military armament and personnel than on education and assistance to the poor, provides corporate welfare during times of high profits and stagnation in labor income, and promotes the use of violent approaches for resolving conflicts, it should not be surprising to find that the public education system has suffered, the gap between the rich and the poor has increased, and the violence escalate as the result of economic injustices.<sup>8</sup>

**3.1 PROPHETIC RESPONSES:** As Christians, we are the heirs of the biblical prophets who summon us "to do right, and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mi. 6:8). As followers of

Jesus, we embrace the Sermon on the Mount: "... Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness .... You are the salt of the earth .... You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:1-6, 13-14). These words challenge us not only as believers but also as citizens of the wealthiest country in the world to be "the salt of the earth" and to serve "the least among us". We must strive to look at economic life through the eyes of faith, applying scriptures and traditional church teaching to the U.S. economic policy.<sup>9</sup> As prophetic laws protecting debtors in Exodus 22:24-26; Leviticus 25:23-28; Deuteronomy 15:1-11, 23:20, 24:6 and 10-13, we need to advocate economic policy calling for debt cancellation and an end to global poverty. Specifically, we need to contact members of congress, asking the congressperson to support fair trade, just economic policy, poverty-focused development assistance and breaking the chains of unjust and oppressive debts.

#### **4. POLITICAL INJUSTICES:**

The U.S. is at the center of the supremacy system. Its boundaries exceed lines drawn across geographically defined spaces. The field of action of the dominance system is global. Its posture towards the world is imperial, and total obedience and conformity are demanded. The proportion of the U.S. budget devoted to the military outdistances the combined military budgets of the rest of the countries of the world combined. The U.S. markets instruments of destruction more than any other country and the combined sales of other active weapons economies.<sup>10</sup> There have been countries invaded and governments overthrown. There has been escalating violence with weapons promoted by a prospering global arms industry. Below are some of the examples of U.S. foreign policies around the world:

U.S. foreign policy had resulted in the violation and slaughter of Maryknoll Sisters, Ita Ford and Maura Clarke along with their companions Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel and Lay Missioner Jean Donovan by government soldiers in El Salvador, whom the U.S. government was aiding with combat training and arms. The U.S. Secretary of State at the time told a Senate committee, "I would like to suggest that the vehicle in which the nuns were riding may have tried to run a roadblock...and there may have been an exchange of fire." The U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations went even further. "The nuns were not just nuns," she told a reporter: "The nuns were also political activists...on behalf of the guerrillas." For twenty-seven years, those gruesome perjuries were never officially corrected until last November 14 when the Senate unanimously passed a resolution (S. Res. 381) honoring the four North American churchwomen. Presenting the resolution, Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis) stated, "We wish to remember and honor the love and dedication these women of faith showed to those they came to serve." The resolution noted that 70,000 Salvadorans were also killed during the civil war, the majority of them poor Mayan peasants, as innocent as the four missionaries. Hundreds of thousands of U.S.

voices, including those of missionaries who were eyewitnesses to the massacres, cried out for a change in U.S. policies in Central America then, but they were unheard!<sup>11</sup>

U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia authorized the assassination of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem that resulted in the bloody downfall of South Vietnam into the hands of Communism on April 30, 1975; as in the killing of Maryknoll Sisters, Ita Ford and Maura Clarke along with their companions, the U.S. State Department suppressed this information for more than thirty years. The political murders of the Catholic president of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, his brother and adviser, Ngo Dinh Nhu, on November 2, 1963, was a major turning point in the war in Vietnam and concluded with the United States withdrawing under terms of the Paris Peace Accord of 1973 which preserved the division temporarily, but the North Vietnamese Communist soon disregarded the treaty and invaded South Vietnam. Over 1.4 million military personnel were killed in the war including 6% of the U.S. armed forces, while estimates of civilian fatalities were up to 5.1 million.

Since the invasion in 1975, Communist authority in Vietnam has been persecuting members of independent churches, imposing controls over cyberspace and the press, restricting public gatherings, and imprisoning its people for their religious and political views. Hundreds of political and religious prisoners remain behind bars in harsh conditions. This group includes democracy activists, cyber-dissidents, and ethnic minority Christians. Detainees are reportedly placed in solitary confinement in cramped, dark, unsanitary cells. They are beaten, kicked, and shocked with electric batons even to death.<sup>12</sup> Sadly, two of my brothers-in-law were imprisoned because of their involvement with the former government and one of them died in the hands of Communism. Vietnamese police routinely arrest and detain suspects without written warrants.

In Burma, Buddhist monks suffering for freedom were much in the news last September and the repression continues; the world saw on television the true face of the dictators in Burma as they beat and kicked Burmese Buddhist monks before loading them onto truckload after truckload to internment, torture or to disappear simply because they protested for democracy in Burma.<sup>13</sup>

**4.1 PROPHETIC RESPONSES:** A prophetic vision of establishing worldwide peace requires communities of faith professing to be the Body of Christ to engage in the prophetic leadership role of confronting and countering the destructiveness of domination systems in whatever form, whether a Burma style of dictatorship or a U.S. style of politics and militarism.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, we need to add our voices to the collective voice of the U.S. Catholic bishops in declaring, "Participation in public life is a moral obligation," by exercising our right to vote, using our ballots to influence a more just U.S. foreign policy and advocating for the end of violence and regional/global arms race by writing letters to legislators. We may not have specific competence in political, economic and military strategies and do not assess particular tactics, but we can share a moral

tradition to help inform policy choices. We also need to persist in praying for peace and those most affected by the war and unjust policy.

## **5. RELIGIOUS INJUSTICES:**

The Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. made national headlines in harboring child sex abusers within their leadership hierarchy. Bishops re-located known pedophile and ephebophile priests to other parishes while, keeping their identities secret, letting many other children to be victimized. The silence of the church, as well as the abused, many of whom suffered in silence for decades, encourages abusers to become habitual rather than single incident predators.<sup>15</sup> Though sexual abuse is not a crime exclusive to the Catholic Church, many in the pews are demanding accountability and change including putting the children first, not the church hierarchy.

**5.1 PROPHETIC RESPONSES:** God sent Prophet Nathan to condemn King David after his adultery with Bathsheba, and the arranged killing of her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 12:1-9). Jesus did not hesitate to condemn when denunciation was required; "anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones who have faith in me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea with a great millstone around his neck" (Matthew 18:6). Thus, these wicked acts must be stopped, condemned and prevented from occurring again.

With that being said, church leadership must continue to facilitate a pastoral response toward the victims of clergy sexual abuse and establish policies that prevent such abuses from ever again causing harm to children. Everyone from the church hierarchy to people in the pew needs to raise awareness of the tragic effects of child abuse and take immediate actions to assist the victims pastorally and effectively provide maximal safeguards to children. Screening procedures for those working with children must be strictly enforced. The educational requirements will require involvement of all levels in the church. The school curriculum in the Catholic educational system must be revised so that children will understand such behavior as "safe touch" and appropriate boundaries with adults.<sup>16</sup>

## **6. ECOLOGICAL INJUSTICES:**

Our planet is becoming increasingly hotter, stormier and suffers from decreasing biodiversity; the global warming disaster is unfolding in slow-motion, as our generation and the next count the days. The situation is deteriorating as we are polluting our life-support systems of soil, water, and air with toxic waste. Many pollutants that have already been released into the atmosphere or have seeped into the ground cannot be contained.

Through burning, logging, or industrial showers of acid rain, we are destroying the earth's forests and ruining the trees that create and purify the air we breathe. Through the chemicals used in several industrial processes, we have torn holes in the protective ozone layer that shields life on earth from the ultraviolet rays of the sun. Our oceans are littered with plastic and mangled with sewage; many animal and plant species are being harvested to extinction; and the wetlands that provide their spawning ground are being drained or overbuilt. We are turning fertile soil into deserts through insensitive agricultural methods, losing roughly eighteen billion tons of topsoil every year. The world is running out of usable farmland; starvation looms.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, my parents went back to Vietnam to visit my brother last year and the environmental state in Vietnam was so dire that they got very sick and had to come back to the U.S. after a couple months there. The air and the water is so polluted that people have to wear masks on the streets and drink bottled water to avoid poisoning.

**6.1 PROPHETIC RESPONSES:** Prophetic tradition on ecological issues finds itself in both scripture and tradition. We are composed of the same matter as our planet because God made humankind from “dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7). With this being said, we are responsible not only for our own survival but the survival of our planet. Additionally, we are entrusted with “stewardships” (Gen. 2:15) of the “goodness of creation” (Gen. 1:31). A Biblical story that brings wisdom for restoring the Earth is the story of Noah and the ark (Gen. 6-9). In Noah’s story, God places an extremely high value on biodiversity. The humans were limited to Noah, his wife, his sons, and their wives, but the priority was biodiversity, one pair of every living creature to keep the integrity of creation intact so that the Earth after the flood can be restored.<sup>18</sup> Many prophets in the Hebrew Bible spoke about ecological crises we face today. It takes some translation to connect their saying to today's world, Hosea 4:1-3 spoke about humans wound the earth is an example. Moving to the New Testament, we are given some valuable wisdom for redemption of the Earth in Romans 8:18-25, all creation awaits redemption.

Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a persistent requirement of our faith. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored<sup>19</sup> as Pope John Paul II, *On Social Concern (Sollicitudo Rci Soeزالis)*, no. 34 exhorts the care for God’s creation: “when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity.” This moral and ethical dimension is echoed by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on *Renewing the Earth*: “the environmental crisis is a moral challenge. It calls us to examine how we use and share the goods of the earth, what we pass on to future generations, and how we live in harmony with God's creation.”

With that in mind, it is clear that it is our moral responsibility to restore the earth through an Ecumenical and Global Cooperation. In a companion document for the UN Agenda 21 adopted at the Earth Summit, Bahai, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, Jewish, and native writers all share their perspective on ethics to care for and restore the Earth.<sup>20</sup> Buddhist tradition, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, addresses environmental issues: "The problems of the environment cross all national boundaries in a way that no nation can afford to ignore, thus bringing about an opportunity for international cooperation." Once the ecumenical movement came to this realization, its gatherings and leaders began to express an inclusive vision of ecology and justice that seeks what is ecologically fitting and socially fair through democratic decision-making for the common good of all nations.<sup>21</sup>

Nations need to refocus higher education, to teach environmental issues and to educate for sustainability. This is a top-priority agenda. Churches must continuously develop leaders and nurture members, gain a voice in the media and a hearing with public officials, and challenge indifference to care about the web of creation.<sup>22</sup>

Continuing to raise voices on ecological justice, such as in 1984, Catholic bishops of twelve Midwestern states issued *Strangers and Guests*. In February 2001, twelve Catholic bishops from the Northwestern states issued a pastoral letter on the Columbia River Watershed: "Caring for Creation and the Common Good."<sup>23</sup>

Continuing to advocate responsible energy and climate change policies, the world now faces an urgent need to end global warming. For example, the United States with four percent of the world's population is responsible for 25 percent of the world's heat-trapping gases. The most industrialized countries must demonstrate global responsibility and set examples to developing countries by making real cuts in greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption.<sup>24</sup>

## **7. CONCLUSION:**

We stand at a crossroads of justice where critical choices must be made. Those choices are at heart religious as we are called for a deeper respect of human dignity, life and God's creation and to engage in activities to protect life of all forms, to promote sustainable communities and to preserve the sanctity of creation. The decisions we make will decisively shape the quality of life for ourselves and generations to come as it is very well said in Deut. 30:19, "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live".<sup>25</sup> With this in mind, as a society, we must choose life over death, blessings over curses as we face the issues of injustices. In short, as a church, we need to open our hearts through scripture, tradition, prayer, theology and liturgy, and open our minds to learn and teach the issues among us, and then open our hands to implement projects that serve justice for all.

## NOTES:

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- <sup>1</sup> Cynthia Bowman, “*Issues of Injustice in the Church and Society*,” in the Prophetic Call, Celebrating Community, Earth, Justice, and Peace, Ed. Hugh Sanborn (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 2004), 118.
- <sup>2</sup> Global Fund For Women, “*Trafficking*”,  
<http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/cms/hot-topics/trafficking/trafficking.html> (January 29, 2008).
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> Humantrafficking.org, “Vietnam, The Situation”, <http://www.humantrafficking.org/countries/vietnam> (Feb. 3, 2008).
- <sup>5</sup> USCCB, “*Migration & Refugee Services*”, <http://www.usccb.org/mrs/traffickingweb.shtml> (January 31, 2008).
- <sup>6</sup> Ann Bragdon, “Prophetic Vision of Building Worldwide Community,” in the Prophetic Call, Celebrating Community, Earth, Justice, and Peace, Ed. Hugh Sanborn (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 2004), 63.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Hugh Sanborn, “*A Prophetic Vision of Establishing Worldwide Peace*,” in the Prophetic Call, Celebrating Community, Earth, Justice, and Peace, Ed. Hugh Sanborn (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 2004), 181.
- <sup>9</sup> USCCB, “*Economic Justice for All*”, <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/EconomicJusticeforAll.pdf> (February, 01, 2008).
- <sup>10</sup> Bragdon, “Prophetic Vision of Building Worldwide Community,” in the Prophetic Call, Celebrating Community, Earth, Justice, and Peace, Ed. Hugh Sanborn, 60.
- <sup>11</sup> Frank Maurovich, “*Today’s Good News about voting with a worldview*”, <http://maryknollmagazine.org/> (January 29, 2008).
- <sup>12</sup> Vietnamhumanrights, “*Human Right in Vietnam*”, <http://www.vietnamhumanrights.net> (January 29, 2008).
- <sup>13</sup> Matthew Peters, “*Mini Monks, Military and Mission To Myanmar*”, <http://maryknollmagazine.org/> (January 29, 2008).
- <sup>14</sup> Sanborn, “*A Prophetic Vision of Establishing Worldwide Peace*,” in the Prophetic Call, Celebrating Community, Earth, Justice, and Peace, Ed. Hugh Sanborn (Danvers, MA: Chalice

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Press, 2004), 187.

<sup>15</sup> Audrey Hector, "Sexual Abuse of Children", <http://www.christiananswers.net/q-eden/childsexualabuse.html/> (January 30, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Archbishop John G. Vlazny, "While we cannot redo past, we can deal effectively in future", <http://www.archdpdx.org/abvlazny/columns/10272000.html> (February 2, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, earth, and Creator Spirit* (Notre Dame, Ind: Paulist Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>18</sup> David W Randle, "A Prophetic Vision of Restoring the Earth," in the Prophetic Call, Celebrating Community, Earth, Justice, and Peace, Ed. Hugh Sanborn (Denvers, MA: Chalice Press,2004),100.

<sup>19</sup> USCCB, "CST", < <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml>> (January 26, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Dieter T Hesse, "Becoming a Church for Ecology and Justice," in the Prophetic Call, Celebrating Community, Earth, Justice, and Peace, Ed. Hugh Sanborn (Denvers, MA: Chalice Press,2004),85.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>25</sup> Bowman, "Issues of Injustice in the Church and Society," in the Prophetic Call, Celebrating Community, Earth, Justice, and Peace, Ed. Hugh Sanborn (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 2004),127.

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