

DO NOT TAKE

CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING AND THE ECONOMY IN ZAMBIA

by
Peter J. Henriot

Paper Presented in JCTR Series
"Relevance of Church's Social Teaching to Zambia Today"

University of Zambia
29 November 2003

JESUIT CENTRE FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
P.O. Box 37774,
10101 Lusaka, Zambia
tel: 260-1-290410 fax: 260-1-290759
e-mail: jctr@zamnet.zm web: www.jctr.org.zm

CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING AND THE ECONOMY IN ZAMBIA

Since we are going to be talking about Zambia in great detail this afternoon, I want to open with a phrase I use more and more these days: "*Zambia is a very rich country, a very rich country indeed, but Zambia is a country of very poor people, very poor people indeed!*"

How and why the two parts of that sentence come together is not simply an *economic* issue, but primarily a *moral, ethical, indeed religious* issue. And that is why our discussion this afternoon focuses on Zambia's economy and the Church's social teaching.

To speak of the economy in Zambia, let me introduce my presentation with mention of three books that have a particular focus on a people-oriented economy. These are studies that challenge very strongly the ordinary discussions, frameworks, parameters, and measurements that characterise so much of economic planning, decisions and outcomes of the Zambian government and the international financial institutions that have such an influence on that government.

Human Development Report of UNDP: this increasingly influential study provides not a report on *economic* development, but *human* development. Its "human development index" measures what is happening to people. It provides a measurement based on three factors: life expectancy at birth (with obvious links to issues such as health, food, surroundings, etc.), adult literacy (showing enrollment rates; literacy is key to being knowledgeable, to entering into decision-making, to planning futures), access to resources needed for decent standard of living (per capita income relating to purchasing power for essentials; e.g., something that the JCTR *Basic Needs Basket* demonstrates). This UNDP report offers a very different picture than that presented by the World Bank *Economic Development Report*.

Development as Freedom, by Amartya Sen: (Nobel Prize, 1998) – an explanation of development measurement in terms of "human capabilities." This focuses not on the primacy of income and wealth but on meaningful human life and substantive freedom, characterised by creative possibilities, consequences of exercise of freedoms, etc. Sen speaks not of *income poverty* but of *capability deprivation*. He has had great influence on the UNDP reports.

Globalisation and Its Discontents, by Joseph Stiglitz: (Nobel Prize, 2001) – a very sharp critique of "market fundamentalism" guiding IMF policies of Structural Adjustment Programmes that have consistently ignored the human dimensions, the consequences for people. Former chief economist for President Clinton and then for World Bank, Stiglitz offers an analysis particularly applicable to Zambia as a case study.

I open by mentioning these three books because for me they say in very clear ways, and come from very eminent sources that are not church-based, the central message of the church's social teaching about economics: *the economy is for the people, the people are not for the economy!*

I want to develop here three major points: 1) what is the church's social teaching about the economy, 2) what value-added relevance does it have to Zambia today and to the policy

discussions, debates and decisions, and 3) what action should we who are influenced by the CST take to change the way our Zambian economy is operating.

But let me offer as a pre-note just a few words about what this church's social teaching (CST) is. (In church circles, it is frequently called "our best kept secret"!)

I define CST as a body of social wisdom, about the human person in community, and about the structures that enable the person to become fully human. It based upon the Word of God (scripture), and it is developed through a reading of the signs of the times.

CST is found in scriptures, in theological writings, in official statements, in witnesses.

The purpose of CST is to inform individual consciences to take the right steps, to guide the church's own actions and its influences on society, and to shape public policy in areas of politics, economics, social relationships, etc. For example, racism or sexism is a sin, the church should teach and witness racial and sexual equality, and apartheid and gender discriminatory structures should be abolished.

My position, and what guides the JCTR, is that the CST contributes a value-added dimension to public decisions and hence is very, very important in Zambia and wider today!

WHAT IS ECONOMIC JUSTICE?

Something that distinguishes the Church's discussion of the economy – in Zambia or anywhere else for that matter – is that we are immediately drawn to ask questions, not about macro-economic indices, introduction of new technologies, or return on investments, but about *people* – what is happening to the people, and especially, what is happening to the poor. That is because we are impelled to look not at a *profit-oriented* economy but at a *people-oriented* economy. We are pushed to ask questions about community, about rights, about cooperation, about gender, about empowerment, about ecological respect, about distribution, ultimately, about *justice*.

For me that push comes from the very simple definition of the economy that I would like you to reflect on: "*The economy is women and men, cooperating with each other, and with the earth, to meet basic needs.*" What does that mean?

1. *Women and men seen as equal partners, subjects of economic activities, not objects.*
The human person is the priority of all economic activity and therefore the economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy. This principle is rooted in the basic human dignity that each and every person equally possesses, as we are told in Genesis 1:27, every woman and man made in God's image and likeness. (What does that say, for example, about "gender and development" issues?)
2. *Cooperating with each other* in and through the various structures of production, exchange, consumption, etc. These structures are human designs, not natural laws, to be evaluated by humans primarily according to their impact on the human person, with special concern for the poor in society. Issues such as free markets, role of the government, wages, unions, etc., are all to be judged in terms of what happens to people, especially to the poor. (What does that say, for example, about privatisation of ZESCO or ZANACO?)

- 3- *Cooperating with the earth* by respecting the integrity of creation. We humans are part of the community of creation, neither dominant nor subservient, but partners and stewards. Economic activity must respect ecological and environmental situations, with concern for a sustainable pattern of sharing both with contemporaries and with future generations. (What does that say, for example, about pollution of our rivers and lakes or extermination of our wildlife?)
4. *To meet basic needs*, that is, to promote the integral and sustainable development necessary for true human fulfilment. Basic needs, of course, are more than material, but are also spiritual, cultural, psychological, communitarian, intellectual, emotional etc. Development is thus seen as *the process of moving from less human conditions to more human conditions* (this is another way of making the "capabilities" point) (What does that say, for example, about priorities for more Manda Hills or more agricultural cooperatives?)

To speak about the economy in this fashion is to speak of *economic justice*. And it is to be guided by what we find so clearly, so challengingly, in scripture and in the church's social teaching. This body of social wisdom offers explanations, directions, motivations, that can help us build a truly human-centred economy. The CST does not offer answers, blueprints, five-year plans, party manifestoes, etc. But it helps us raise questions, suggests where to look for answers, offers norms for evaluations of those answers, and prods us to action. It is not a roadmap but a "lamp unto my feet."

I believe that CST is very important today in dealing with the Zambian economy and all its problems, challenges, possibilities, etc. Let me hasten to add that I do not believe there is such a thing as a "Christian economy." I prefer, rather, to speak of an "economy guided by Christian principles." (In parentheses, that's why I don't believe Zambia should be a "Christian nation," constitutionally or rhetorically, but a "nation guided by Christian principles, practiced by good people"! But that, of course, is another topic for another day! And of course it relates to the Catholic Bishops' recent pastoral letter on the constitutional review!)

What are these guiding principles that are found in scripture and in the church's social teaching? Many of us may know these deep in our hearts, if not always in our words and in our practices, indeed in our politics and economics.

- *human dignity*, demanding a fundamental equality of respect for human life, of every life, woman and man, poor and rich, African and non-African, etc., so that basic socio-economic rights must be promoted – such as food, education, health, work, etc.
- *community*, which emphasises, in the words of the African proverb, "I am because you are, and you are because I am" – *sharing* is an absolute condition for human development, a matter not of charity but of justice
- *promotion of the common good*, so that everyone has both the *duty* to contribute to human improvement and the *right* to enjoy the benefits coming from that improvement
- *solidarity*, where the needs and concerns of all in our society must shape the orientation, organisation and operation of the economy, so that no one is left out – if they are, then everyone suffers!
- *option for the poor*, so that the needy, marginalised, oppressed, forgotten, all have a privileged position, so that economic activity must necessarily aim at up-lifting them in

~ special solutions; thus a primary evaluation question for us must be: *what is happening to the poor?*

- *common destiny of the goods of the earth*, which means that private property is a conditioned right in that its use must benefit the common good or else the very right to the property is forfeited; goods of earth belong to all, not simply to those who grabbed them first!
- *integrity of creation*, so that economic activity must respect the environment and promote a wise use of natural resources, both now and for the future.

These principles are *radical*. Indeed, in Zambia today, these principles are *revolutionary*!

I repeat that these "ethical, moral, religious" principles are precisely the emphases that are to be found in the very secular, non-churchy UNDP reports and writings of the UNDP, Sen and Stiglitz. But, sadly to say, these principles are not always manifested in the elements of the programmes enforced by the World Bank and the IMF, in the priorities manifested by transnational corporations that invest in Zambia, or in the policies practiced by the Zambian government of First, Second or Third Republics.

And herein lies the challenge for all of us: citizens, students, NGOs, churches, trade unions, politicians, business people, etc. The result of ignoring, or relegating to minor importance, the priority of economic justice has had disastrous results in Zambia that I hardly need to go into much detail in speaking with you this afternoon. You know them from real life experience, of what it means to live in a heavily indebted poor country, in a very rich country with very poor people, in an environment of deteriorating quality, in a nation where *economic apartheid* – the artificial and growing division between rich and poor – is becoming all too obvious and all too dangerous.

Ignoring the fundamental importance of this economic justice can lead to a political stance in which the Vice President of this country could say last week that if the citizens wanted a Constituent Assembly to get a "constitution that will stand the test of time," then they must be prepared to sacrifice books in schools, drugs in hospitals, and other fundamental basic social development necessities – and not even mention that other sacrifices would be much more in order – fancy vehicles for government officials, needless by-elections, useless district administrators, wasteful foreign travel (accompanied by massive spending on send offs and greetings for traveling officials), etc., etc.

APPLICATION OF CST PRINCIPLES

But what would application of CST principles mean in the concrete in Zambia's economy today. I suggest that a set of seven suggestions spelled out in the Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter *The Future Is Ours* in 1992, at the start of the Third Republic, have equal relevance today. Remember, this was just as Zambia was entering into the *most rigid, most rapid, most radical* SAP on the African continent. What did the Bishops say, and what questions are raised for us today?

I quote from the Pastoral Letter, and add my questions:

27. Reflecting on the current situation in Zambia as we are restructuring our economy, we urge that the following principles from the social teaching of our Church are particularly relevant:

- a. The burden of restructuring the economy must not fall disproportionately on those who already suffer, this is, the poor, especially women, children, elderly and handicapped (e.g., removal of mealie-meal subsidies must be matched by measures which also ask sacrifices of the better-sectors of society).

Today: Why are taxes necessary to support poverty programmes not *proportionately* designed so that they do not fall most heavily on the poor themselves? Is 30% for everyone fair and just?

- b. Private property, while a right to be guaranteed, is not an absolute right and must always serve the common good (e.g., selling off the parastatals must not concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a few for their own benefits).

Today: why has there been a systematic refusal by the IFIs and government to do a thorough economic and social analysis of privatisation, while still pushing for further privatisation?

- c. Economic well-being does not consist in *having* more but in *being* more (e.g., promotion of more and more consumer goods should not of itself be seen as a sign of economic health).

Today: why are more opportunities available for the rich to spend money, even this Christmas, at the very moment that the Human Development Index is showing increasing suffering for the majority of Zambians?

- d. There should always be a priority of labour over capital. This means that the input of the human person has priority over the structures of money, natural resources and technology in designing economic policies (e.g., the promotion of decent jobs takes precedence over profit for foreign investors).

Today: why are we experiencing the pullout of South African investors such as Supreme – what advantages were they given that are now expiring (e.g., tax incentives)?

- e. Production should be promoted primarily to meet the needs of the people and not primarily to return profits on investment, either local or foreign (e.g., the needs of the poor are more important than the wants of the rich).

Today: What code of conduct is in place to promote true Zambian sustainable development, so that we can have better *investors* and fewer *infestors*?

- f. The mechanisms of the free market must always be subject to social control to assure more equitable distribution and more effective protection of all the various goods of society (e.g., market forces by themselves cannot control basic services such as health, education transport, housing, nor protect collective goods such as environment)

Today: Does *market fundamentalism* still play the dominant role in our economic planning for the future? Remember that "the market may be a good *servant* but certainly is a very bad *master*."

- g. The State has a legitimate positive role in the economy, not in simply enabling private enterprise but also in promoting more human conditions for workers and consumers alike

(e.g. the Government should regulate industries and commerce to protect workers' rights and to curb exploitation of the poor and weak).

Today: has "savage capitalism" taken over from basic humanism? One doesn't need to return to the bad *old* days of state dominated economy of the Second Republic to know that the bad *new* days of a retreat of the state in the Third Republic has been disastrous!

Surely, more could be said about agriculture – and, for example, why the CST has powerful lessons on land policies and on the introduction of GMOs; and more about environment, with powerful CST lessons about respect for the integrity of creation as it affects policies like deforestation, air and water pollution, etc.; and more about external debt, with powerful CST lessons about cancellation, reparations and honest management of debt relief resources. But let's take those and other issues up in the discussion and further conversations in this JCTR series on the church's social teaching and Zambian issues today.

SOME DIRECTIONS ON THE WAY FORWARD

Let me conclude with some obvious remarks about the social action consequences of what I've been saying.

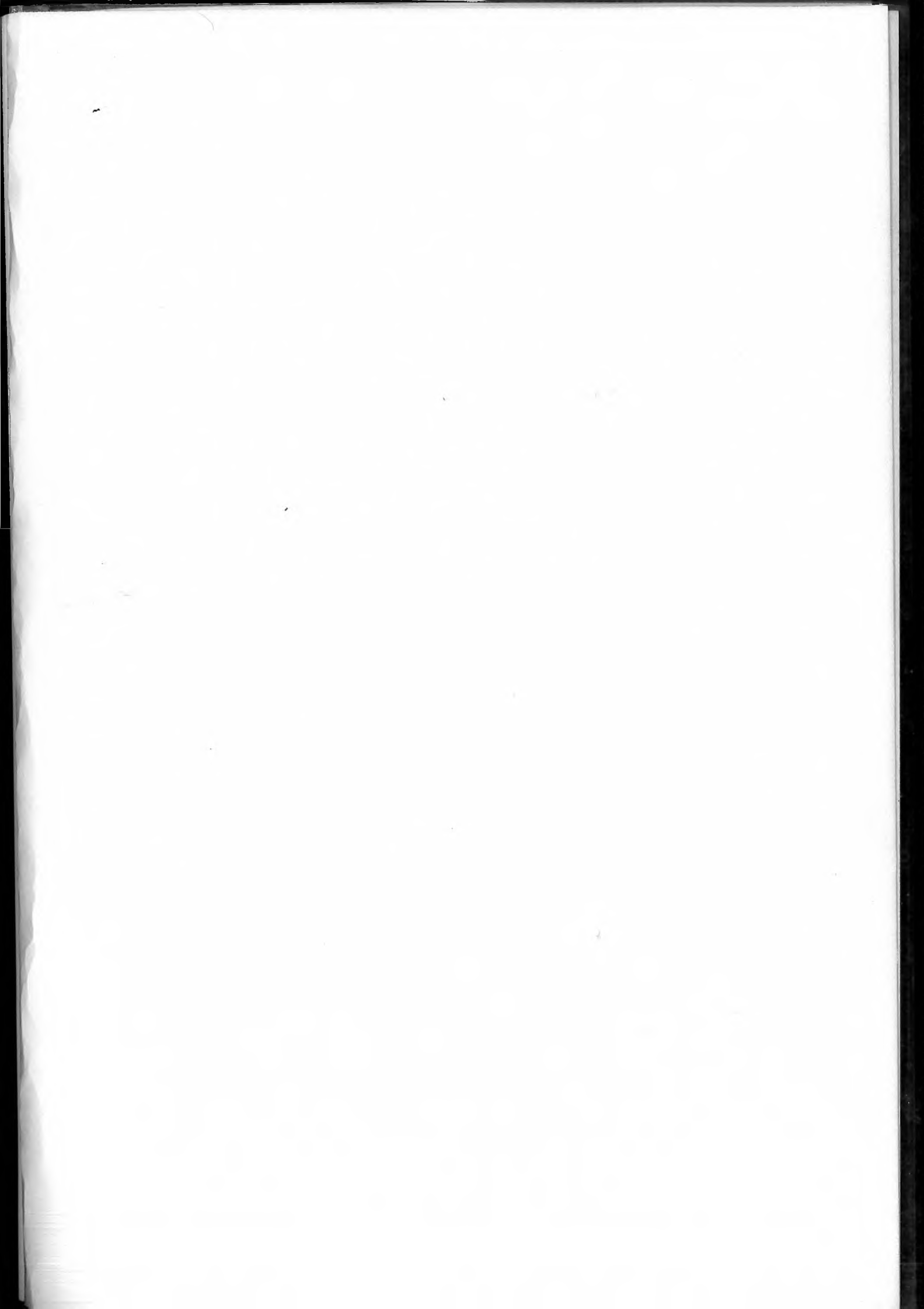
First, there is need for *passionate response* to the economic situation in Zambia today. It is simply unacceptable that 80% of Zambians today go without sufficient food and clean water, decent housing, basic social services of health and education, and a hope for the children of the future. That should bring a passion, a fire, an anger, an enthusiasm that will affect our response. Whether or not we are guided by CST, we know that something is very, very wrong today in Zambia, and that it does not need to be so!

Second, there is a need for *economic literacy* in understanding the issues of the day. The work of CCJP and JCTR and CSPR and other civil society groups aims to build up that literacy. People must know what is happening, why it is happening, and what can be done about it.

Third, there is need for *strong advocacy* to bring about the political changes required to have a more socially just economy in Zambia. Yes, the advocacy must be directed to external forces such as the IMF and World Bank – Jubilee-Zambia makes strong efforts at this advocacy. But it must primarily be directed at the Zambian government – and that recalls some of the lessons of CST for politics, spoken about in the first of these JCTR series, with Joe Komakoma. I like to recall the guide that CCJP uses in evaluating Zambia's budget – *the problem is not resources but priorities!* Every candidate should be evaluated on their views on the economy; every meeting with an MP or a government official or a party official should focus on their plans to bring greater justice to our economy.

CST is, I repeat from my opening remarks, not a roadmap but a light unto our feet. I pray that these opening remarks will provide some brighter light – and some strong steps along the way to economic justice in this very rich and very wonderful country of Zambia!

Thank you!



Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR)

JCTR Repository

<https://repository.jctr.org.zm>

Presentation

Advocacy on Socio-Economic Development

2003-11-29

Church's Social Teaching And The Economy In Zambia

Henriot, Peter J

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection

Henriot, P. (2003). Church's Social Teaching and the Economy in Zambia. Lusaka, Zambia: Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

<https://repository.jctr.org.zm/handle/20.500.14274/91>

Downloaded from JCTR Repository, Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR)