

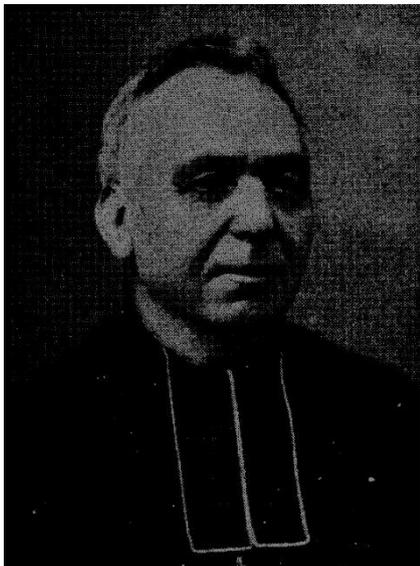
Mountain of the Social sector and Healthcare

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When we look at our society, the social sector and health care give us a glimpse at how people see and care for themselves and their fellow human beings. We take healthcare and social services for granted, but the question of how much we should care for others is a social reality that divides society in two: there are people who need care and support and others who provide care. The starting point is therefore an unequal situation: the person in need awaits a response from the community at large. The extent to which this demand for care is met depends heavily on society. As we can see in our own country, supply and demand interact quite well, which benefits everyone. But sometimes, the supply is insufficient and the demand for care remains unanswered; which causes social tensions.

1. The field of social care

Here the attention is focused on poverty, such as unemployment, orphans, immigration, etc. Poverty can take many forms. We generally think of insufficient food, but other factors also play an important role in our country: a lack of good housing, a language deficit, single-parent families ... Whatever the causes of inequality (structural, family or due to a crisis), our society has taken measures to fight poverty: unions, debt mediation, pensions and social security. In our country, enormous steps have been taken over the past hundred years to combat discrimination based on inequality, for



instance by also giving women the right to vote. Nevertheless, a gap persists: the average salary for men and women is still not the same.

In Belgium / Flanders we have many government aid organizations (such as the OCMW, TCA, Welzijnsschakels), as well as a large number of voluntary organizations: Catholic and Evangelical Protestant (such as the WZS of Helpende Hand in Ghent, Gave Veste for migrants and asylum seekers, the VZW Tremplin for vulnerable families in Brussels and its surroundings, Notre Maison des Enfants et l'Olivier in Genk, Bethesda, the CPC to name a few). It must be said that in Belgium, we have strong social security because of our Christian heritage, which we owe in large part to the Roman Catholic Church (for instance to Cradle of the CVP and the ACV. See image of pastor Daens hereby).

The social sector is a hot political topic. This is evidenced by the various ministerial portfolios at federal, regional, provincial and local levels. At the federal level, the two most relevant ministries are those of Ms. Maggie De Block as Minister of Social Affairs and Health, as well as Asylum and Migration, and of Ms. Nathalie Muylle, Minister of Labour, Economy and Consumers, in charge of the fight against poverty, equal opportunities and people with disabilities. At regional level, Ms. Hilde Crevits is responsible for the Economy, Labour and Social Economy sectors. Mr Bart Somers is the Flemish Minister for Integration and Equal Opportunities, among others, with integration powers. Mr Wouter Beke is responsible for welfare, public health and the family, as well as for poverty reduction. At the local level, we find more or less the same powers, sometimes in the hands of different people.

Some questions and problems:

1. First, we can ask ourselves questions about the feasibility of full equality. "There will always be poor people among you," Jesus said, " but that doesn't mean we shouldn't fight poverty.
2. A society that does not aim at equal opportunities for all falls back to the level of "survival of the strongest", the law of the strongest. According to the Bible, this cannot be the will of God. As many scriptures repeat over and over again, God defends the poor, defends orphans and widows, that is, the weak of our society. God therefore expects a degree of solidarity, that the "strong" (healthy and socially strong people) take responsibility for the weak.
3. In the Old Testament there were all kinds of social arrangements to protect society from progressive poverty. The Jubilee was the most striking example of this (Leviticus 25: 8-16). Any property lost due to injustice or accident would then be returned to the original owner. In this way, a limit was imposed on the unlimited pursuit of profit and exploitation.
4. The most typical biblical word for the social sector is undoubtedly the word "justice", and this is based on the fact that God is a just God who ensures that everyone gets what is appropriate and that no one is subjected to unfair exploitation. Thus, discrimination and a disproportionate entitlement of the strongest are perversions of God's good plan.
5. On the other hand, we must also ensure that people do not benefit from social security unduly.

2. The field of healthcare

This area focuses on the care for our own well-being, our health as a whole, and not just physical health. A person is more than his body. This is paramount when we speak of "healing". If physical improvement is no longer possible, for example in terminally ill cancer patients, care should always be provided, palliative care. This is definitely not the time when we can give up on people! It is in these crises of life that we see the value that society places on an individual human life. In healthcare, we see the ethical issues our society grapples with: euthanasia, abortion, transgender, genetic engineering, etc. it's up to you to map them.

As Christians in a secular society, we have a story to tell. What does the Bible say about well-being and health? Shalom, the biblical word for health, is more than the absence of disease. It indicates "completeness, fulfilment, well-being". Deep down, it means that man's relationship with God and with his fellows is fully in order; there are no more debts to pay!

Some questions and problems:

1. In our society, "health" can become an idol, just think of exaggerated "fitness & health" behaviour.
2. The increasing technologization of the health sector has led to dehumanization. Our healthcare has become impersonal. The person behind the disease is often overlooked.

3. Healthcare has become a multibillion dollar business; just think of the pharmaceutical industry. Is this healing or profit?

4. When does someone lose the right to defend their own life? Is there an "inhuman" life anyway? Is a 12 week foetus a full human life? Or is it only from 18 weeks? This is evidenced by recent legislative proposals aimed at extending abortion in Belgium, removing restrictions and even making it a "right". Pressure groups are also working on it all over the world.

5. The same happens with the demand for a dignified death. Here too, the weak and demented person has a right to protection. How to bring health and well-being to this vulnerable population group? The options of manipulation on the one hand and neglect on the other turn out to very real and both problematic.

6. Finally, in the daily care of our suffering human companions, important aspects such as compassion and mercy are highlighted. The story of the Good Samaritan is rightly referred to (Luke 10: 25-37).



Some permanent prayer topics:

1. For decision-makers and ministers: for wisdom, social commitment, justice, good balance, respect for life and family values, a holistic approach to health and social care.

2. May the love of Christ urge us to help those in need: that Christians and churches show the way in caring for the poorest.

3. For Christian doctors, nurses and social workers: so that they may spread and live the love of God; that many people in vulnerable situations be more open to God and seek him because of their needs.

Specific to the social sector:

4. That discrimination based on injustice be eliminated from the world.

5. That social workers can reach the weakest (because they are often difficult to find or to reach).

6. For a fair and humane migration and asylum policy: that true refugees can be warmly welcomed and integrated.

7. For jubilee-type measures aimed at reducing inequalities.

8. That relations and common interests prevail over the individual search for profit; against the humanist mentality of "me at the centre".

Specifically for healthcare:

9. For good healthcare open to all, without promoting health to idol status.

10. For the respect of life: pray that the pressure groups (in the world and in Belgium) which want to make abortion a "right" are stopped; that pro-life groups can have a stronger voice in the media.

11. For the respect of the elderly.

12. That euthanasia does not become the norm and be shown in the media as a "courageous act"; that the votes against may also be heard.