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WHO ARE THE MARGINALISED?

In the guidelines given to the Barcelona Secretariate of the mission to those on the fringe of society we find a definition of this concept. Here are its terms:

"We consider as marginalised all individuals or groups who, for economic, racial, cultural or ideological reasons or because of physical or mental disabilities, have not got free access to the benefits of society (work, culture, services, participation, consideration etc.); everything in fact, which places them in a situation where they are unable to fulfil their potential as human beings."

REMARKS

- The economic factor is all important. If you have money, even though you are disabled, you are not marginalised or treated as such. A President of the United States was paralysed as a result of polio. A handicapped person from a wealthy family gets all the care that specialised services can provide.
- In some countries, immigrants belonging to certain races who come in search of work, are completely marginalised. Some are sent to prison merely because they do not have valid identity documents.
- The person who, in his youth, did not have a chance to receive instruction or education will have difficulty in reaching a position where he will be treated with the respect due to him as a person.
- In cities many sick people receive only occasional treatment. Society does not accept full responsibility for them and if it is a totally capitalistic society so much the worse for the sick.

THE SOCIALLY MARGINALISED PERSON

He lives on the fringe of society: he failed to keep peace with it and is now without friends, if indeed, he ever had any; he has given up hoping; he realises that it is impossible to improve his situation and ends by feeling that he is "on the other side of the tracks" among those condemned to look in from the outside, to watch the march of social progress, wealth, well-being, decent standards of living, social consideration and self-respect.

He does not belong!

THOSE WHO SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED AS SOCIALLY MARGINALISED

- Certain groups who, for ideological or political reasons or merely to defy the social system, opt out. Generally speaking, they can give up their self-imposed marginalisation if they so wish.
- Certain classes who consider themselves or call themselves marginalised: women engaged in the feminist struggle, homosexuals, prostitutes etc. We all, in some way or other, suffer a degree of marginalisation. There is always someone who does not accept us or places to which we do not have access.

THE MARGINALISED PERSON AS DEFINED BY THE DIOCESE OF BARCELONA

- He endures material poverty and human deprivation as a cause or consequence of his marginalisation.
- He cannot escape from his unfortunate condition without help from others.
- He does not choose this condition, does not seek it and is incapable of protest against the society which forced it on him or of seeking help to face up to and improve his lot.
- His condition is imposed not by the society as a whole but by groups within it. He ends up by creating a world of his own, a world apart... Social legislation is of no real help to him (in the end it serves to punish him). Cultural organisations do not help him nor do the social services to which he cannot or does not know how to apply without help from somebody else.
- It is very difficult for society, whether through government agencies or voluntary organisations, to take responsibility for the complete and effective integration of such people.

THE MARGINALISED

- Many children who do not receive even basic care from birth.
- Those who get no education — they are often rejected because of the problems they create.
- Young people without home or family or who have left home for reasons which were unforeseen or unforeseeable.
- Old people without a roof over their head.
- Unmarried mothers, rejected by their families.
- Prostitutes, especially when they get old.
- Prisoners abandoned by their families and without legal aid.
- Families of unemployed parents, left without means of subsistence.
- The sick who are unable to do productive work and have no families to help them.
- The mentally handicapped who, at best, are locked away in institutions where they often receive treatment which reduces them to vegetables.
- Migrant workers who cannot find work, have neither home, family or friends and no knowledge of the language of the country.
- Ex-prisoners whose families don't want them.
- Vagrants without a home, belonging to no group, no family.
- The populations of countries which did not benefit by industrialisation and are exploited by the more advanced countries of the world.
- Ethnic minorities persecuted in their own country.

We have among us many marginalised people whether in rich countries or poor countries. It is only too easy to ignore them, to pass them by, to forget them. At best, we concern ourselves with them when they inconvenience us. Then we try to get rid of them by placing them in "homes", putting them out of sight in shanty towns or slums. If we could, we would put them in concentration camps.

Some years ago, when I was working in a center with five hundred boys between the ages of six and fifteen I was subjected to all sorts of criticism, recriminations and prohibitions, even by the administration, because we decided that the boys had the right to go for a walk, play with the children in neighbouring villages, go to the cinema or go on excursions in small groups...

But Christ went to meet the marginalised of His time: lepers, beggars, the blind, the possessed, prostitutes... And we walk with Christ only when we are sensitive to this burning problem: The existence of men — our brothers — whom we ignore or try to get rid of lest they trouble our tranquillity!

Brother Adrián TRESCENTS
Residència Provincial La Salle
Sant Joan de La Salle, 38
BARCELONA - 22 - SPAIN