

# SOCIAL JUSTICE REFLECTIONS

## INTRODUCTION



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & WELCOME

We acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we live. We acknowledge their Elders, past, present and emerging.

Welcome to reflections on the justice teachings of the Catholic Church. In our daily life, many of us become involved in one or several justice issues. We can have a deep passion for justice. As we read these reflections, we invite the Holy Spirit to help us identify where the Spirit is leading us in our commitment for justice.

As a young person in the mid-1970s, my own understanding of justice deepened with a study of two international church statements issued in 1971

- [Justice in the World](#) by the Synod of Bishops and
- Pope Paul VI's call to action in his Letter [Octogesima Adveniens](#) on the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of modern Catholic Social Teaching in 1893.

### 1) The World Synod of Bishops Document on Justice in the World

Working for justice is not an optional extra for Christians. The Bishops stressed that *“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”* #6

Working for justice recognizes both responsibility and genuine humility. *“In the face of the present-day situation of the world, marked as it is by the grave sin of injustice, we recognize both our responsibility and our inability to overcome it by our own strength. Such a situation urges us to listen with a humble and open heart to the word of God, as he shows us new paths towards action in the cause of justice in the world.”* #29.

## 2) A Call to Action

In 1971, Pope Paul VI invited people to examine themselves to see what they had done up until then, and what they ought to do.

He stressed the importance of personal responsibility and effective action.

Let us read what he taught.

*“It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustice and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. It is too easy to throw back on others responsibility for injustice, if at the same time one does not realize how each one shares in it personally, and how personal conversion is needed first. This basic humility will rid action of all inflexibility and sectarianism, it will also avoid discouragement in the face of a task which seems limitless in size.”*

He spoke about

- our Christian hope through the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus,
- the hope that comes from knowing that other people *“are at work, to undertake actions of justice and peace working for the same ends”*
- within the heart of people, there is a will to be brothers and sisters, and *“a thirst for justice and peace, which is to be expanded”*.

## 3) Foundations of Catholic Social Teaching

In 2020, Pope Francis delivered a video message to mark the virtual meeting of judges who are members of the Committee for Social Rights of Africa and America.

He identified six foundations of Catholic Social Teaching.

They are reality, generation of justice, commitment, history, people and solidarity.

- we should not lose sight of the **reality** of opulence and poverty and for *“an increasing number of people their dignity is unknown and their human rights are ignored and violated.”*
- we realize that over time, the **generation of justice** has become *“a collective work, an ensemble work”*, a continuing work because *“like good and love, the just is a task that must be conquered every day, because imbalance is a temptation at every moment.”*
- we need **commitment**.
- we admit that **history** influences justice issues today. *“In the past there are all the roots of the experiences, even those of social justice that today we want to rethink, grow and strengthen.”*
- we should not become elitist. We work with **people**.

*“Starting from the Gospel, what God asks of us believers is to be God's people, not God's elite. Because those who follow the path of "God's elite" end up in the well-known elitist clericalisms that work for the people, but do nothing with the people, do not feel like a people.”*

- we should be in **solidarity** as we fight  
*“against the structural causes of poverty, inequality, lack of work, land and housing.”*

#### **4) Two key applications of social justice today**

During these reflections, many church justice sources are listed.

In working for justice today, two key sources were highlighted by Pope Francis in 2021.

*“In carrying out this mission, you can draw extensively from the Encyclicals Laudato Si’ and Fratelli Tutti, while working to apply them in the light of various local situations and the different continental, regional and national settings. Indeed, in every part of the world integral development, and thus justice and peace, can only be advanced by pursuing these two paths: care for our common home and fraternity and social friendship. Two paths arising from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, yet paths on which we can walk alongside many men and women of other Christian confessions, other religions, and those with no particular religious affiliation. For this reason, I encourage you to persevere in your work with hope, determination and creativity. “*

[\(Message of Pope Francis to Participants in the World Meeting of Justice and Peace Commissions of Episcopal Conferences 2021\)](#)

#### **5) Fourteen Reflections**

Welcome to these reflections on Catholic Church international and Australian church sources for social justice.

*Reflection 1: Introduction: Social Justice Reflections*

*Reflection 2: Catholic Social Teaching to 1959*

*Reflection 3: Catholic Social Teaching 1960-1979*

*Reflection 4: Catholic Social Teaching 1980-1999*

*Reflection 5: Catholic Social Teaching 2000-2012*

*Reflection 6: Catholic Social Teaching 2013-present*

*Reflection 7: The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*

*Reflection 8: A Spirituality of Justice in the Teachings of Pope Francis.*

*Reflection 9: Social Justice Sources – Australia to 1979*

*Reflection 10: Social Justice Sources – Australia 1980-1999*

*Reflection 11: Social Justice Sources – Australia 21st Century*

*Reflection 12: Social Justice and the Earth, Our Common Home*

*Reflection 13: Church in Australia - Social Justice and the Earth, Our Common Home*

*Reflection 14: Church in Australia – First Nations*

6) Previous Reflections, which can be accessed at the [highlighted hyperlinks](#) below, include:

1. [\*Social Justice and The Cross of Jesus\*](#)

(quoting Chrism Mass Homily 2021 of Pope Francis, as I ask three questions

1. Do the joyful Good News of Jesus Christ and the Cross of Jesus Christ go together?
2. Could we say that the cross existed throughout the earthly life of Jesus?
3. Are we scandalised by the Cross and run away from it?)

2. [\*Liberation and the Cross\*](#)

(St Paul's Letter to the Galatians)

3. [\*The Power of the Cross\*](#)

(St Paul's Letter of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians)

4. [\*Carrying the Cross in love and solidarity\*](#)

(Matthew's Gospel and Teresa of Avila)

5. [\*Steadfast in Hope\*](#)

(In the Catechism, and in St Paul's Letters 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Romans)

6. [\*Love, Justice and Hope in times of discrimination, persecution and systemic evil\*](#)

(in The Book of Daniel, The Book of Revelation, The Letters of John, and Catholic Social Teaching)

7) Previous Scriptural Reflections on Abuse

1. [\*Church Sexual Abuse, Authority & Spirituality. A personal reflection on Susanna & Daniel in Chapter 13, Old Testament Book of Daniel\*](#)

2. [\*Innocence & Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. A personal reflection on the Gospel of Luke Chapters 22 - 24\*](#)

In 1990, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council presented an Issues Paper titled *Social Justice in Everyday Life*. It said:

*"A commitment to social justice is an essential characteristic of a life lived according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

*It is not possible, in the Catholic tradition, to live out a full life of Faith in the absence of this commitment."*

Let us explore together our essential Christian relationship with social justice.

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