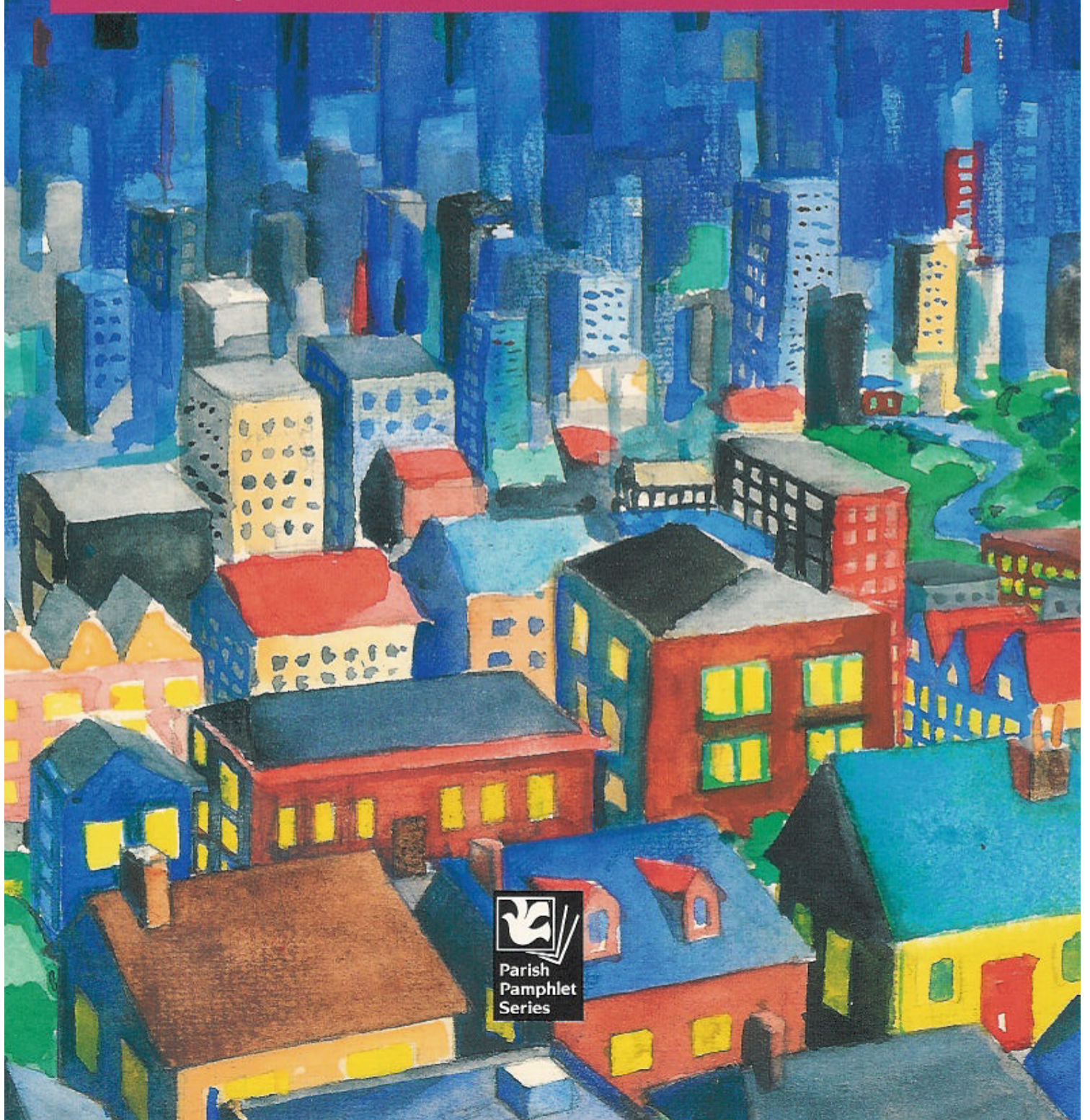


# SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

An Issues Paper from the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council



# SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

(First published 1990, reprinted 1992, website 2003)

*The realm of the everyday is the context within which a large number of people are more likely to experience, at least initially, their Spirit-given dignity and power to take part in the transformation of the world.*

## Introduction

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. The work for justice is an essential and urgent task for Christians since too many people are suffering and urgent reforms and bold transformations are required.

This call to action for justice is a clear message from the Universal Church, a message proclaimed and reiterated time and again by many popes as well as by the Second Vatican Council, the Synod of Bishops, numerous national Bishops Conferences and regional federations of Bishops Conferences. It is a message tirelessly proclaimed by Pope John Paul II; it is a message close to the heart of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

Although the call to work for justice is clear, consistent and unambiguous, it is not always heard or acted upon. At times this is because the words are not heard clearly or are misunderstood. At other times the words are heard clearly enough but the message is opposed because of a hardness of heart. The Church itself needs to reflect continually on both its actions and the manner of its communication to ensure the clear proclamation of the Gospel.

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC) believes that a major reason the Gospel of Justice is not always lived in its fullness is because of a sense of smallness and powerlessness on the part of those otherwise open to the message being proclaimed. This is no mere hunch or intuition but a belief based on the experience of many people over a number of years.

In this document the ACSJC seeks to continue to proclaim the Church's teaching on social justice and to offer a set of reflections on how this may be lived out within the *ordinary* settings and circumstances of life. The focus is on what it is possible for Australian women, men and children to do for justice in the *smallness* of the immediate worlds of home, school, workplace, neighbourhood.

This is not a comprehensive statement on action for justice since it focuses on only one possible context for such action, that of the ordinary or everyday dimension of life. This is an important location for action, but wider or more public commitments in social, economic, political and cultural realms are also significant. Prophetic witness of a public kind is often required in the work for justice, a witness that may at times be of a dramatic or even heroic character, as is attested by the life and death of Archbishop Oscar Romero, among others.

This document concentrates on the small and ordinary because these aspects of our existence are often undervalued by a society which emphasises the large and the public. Within the Christian tradition, the hidden, the small and seemingly powerless are held in special regard, often pointing to the presence of God's kingdom. The realm of the everyday is also the context within which a large number of people are more likely to experience, at least initially, their Spirit-given dignity and power to take part in the transformation of the world.

The ACSJC hopes that this paper will help Catholic people to take the first step, or perhaps a further step, on their journey towards justice.

## **To renew the Earth: The Catholic Church's teachings on social justice**

The Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ requires all those who believe in it to work towards a radical transformation of the world.

The Church's Magisterium has over the last hundred years developed a systemic body of teachings on justice, development and peace to assist Catholics in their task of renewing the earth. A minority of Catholics in Australia have indeed heard the Gospel call to justice and peace and have committed themselves to respond to this call.

Many, perhaps the majority of Catholics, continue to remain largely unaware of the content or even of the existence of the Church's teaching in the social area. The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council is committed to assisting the Church at national and diocesan levels to remedy this situation.

This section of this 'Issues Paper' presents a concise introduction to the Church's teaching on social justice. Being a summary it does not exhaust the riches of Catholic teaching.

Catholic social teaching is a clear body of official Church teaching on the social order in its cultural, political, economic and environmental dimensions. This teaching is an interpretation of reality in the light of the Gospel, the Church's tradition and human wisdom.

Until recently Catholic social teaching was proclaimed primarily through papal encyclicals (i.e. letters from the Pope to the whole Church), exhortations and speeches. More recently, reflecting the changes wrought by Vatican II, authoritative statements have been made by the Synod of Bishops, and by national Bishops Conferences and Federations of Bishops Conferences. In Australia, Catholic social teaching has been articulated, promoted and applied by the Conference of Bishops both in its own right and through agencies it has set up for this purpose.

Church teaching in the social areas deals with central, and not peripheral or optional, aspects of the Catholic faith. The 1971 Synod of Bishops document, *Justice in the World* (n 6), declared 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.

The Synod, in agreement with the Pope, is indicating in this statement that the Church's work for justice and peace is an essential part of its role. This work is not an option to be chosen according to individual interest and inclination. It is, rather, a responsibility incumbent on all the followers of Jesus. Once accepted, this responsibility can then be lived out in many different ways according to our own informed discernment of God's call in the concrete context of our lives.

### **Basic principles**

Catholic social teaching proposes that human reason, combined with insights drawn from scripture, can provide a valid interpretation of the social order, can animate that order with authentic values and can provide guidelines for action. The following constitute the basic principles of Catholic social teaching:

## **1. The purpose of the social order**

The purpose of the social order is, quite simply, the person. In the words of Pius XII:

The human individual, far from being an object and, in fact, must be and must continue to be, its subject, its foundation and its end. (*Pacem in Terris*, n 26)

The fact that human beings are created in the image of God and have been redeemed by Jesus Christ means that they have a fundamental dignity. This dignity carries with it a number of inalienable rights and responsibilities, including that of actively shaping our histories, both as individuals and communities.

Although the purpose of society is the person, this person is not to be understood as a self-sufficient individual, separate and autonomous from others. The emphasis on the fundamental importance and dignity of the human person needs to be held in creative tension with the principle of solidarity.

## **2. The principle of solidarity**

The principle of solidarity proclaims that the human person is social by nature. That is, we are not to picture society as something additional to the person. Rather, the social dimension is part and parcel of our humanity. Vatican II stated that:

The human person is social by nature. (*Gaudium et Spes*, n 12)  
and

It has pleased God to make people holy and save them not merely as individuals, without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people. (*Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 11, Article 9)

Whenever we reflect on our humanity we need to remember both its personal and social dimensions, recalling in our work for justice that the development of individual people, and the development of societies depend on each other. (*Populorum Progressio*, n 43).

The principle of solidarity needs, in its turn, to be held in creative tension with the principle of subsidiarity.

## **3. The principle of subsidiarity**

The principle of subsidiarity states that:

It is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and a disturbance to right order to transfer to the larger and higher collectivity functions which can be provided for by lesser and subordinate bodies. (*Quadragesimo Anno*, n 79)

Collectivities can be seen to exist at different levels, ranging from that of the small group and the family, through neighbourhood associations and State organisations, right up to national governments and international institutions. This principle declares that higher levels, such as national governments, should not perform functions which can be better provided for at lower levels, such as local communities or the family.

The purpose of this principle is to rule out as a Christian option the collective State, where all power is centralised. It also safeguards personal initiative and creativity.

#### **4. The purpose of government**

The purpose of government is the promotion of the Common Good which is described by Pope John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra* (n 65) as:

The sum total of those conditions of social living, whereby people are enabled more fully and more readily to achieve their own perfection.

That is, the State is required in Catholic social teaching to intervene actively in society, including the economy, to promote and ensure justice. The State is not to be reduced to a mere passive observer of socio-economic processes, including the process of the market mechanism.

#### **5. The principle of participation**

The principle of participation states that human beings, in their work for a new society, need to take an active role in the development of socio-economic, political and cultural life.

The emphasis here is on the human responsibility to be *subjects* rather than *objects*, that is, on being active shapers of history rather than merely passive recipients of other people's decisions.

#### **6. The universal purpose of goods**

The principle of the universal purpose of goods states that the goods of the world are meant for all.

Although the Church has consistently upheld the right to private property as a fundamental human right, it also teaches that this right is not absolute and untouchable. The right to private property is in fact subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone. (*Laborem Exercens*, n 14)

#### **7. The option for the poor**

This principle requires us to stand side-by-side with the poor and oppressed.

According to John Paul II, it is Jesus himself who, in and through the poor and outcast, comes to question us. Jesus asks us to listen to the poor in a special way and to 'walk in their shoes'. Further, it is primarily the poor, the rejected and simple who really hear God's message. It is they therefore who become, in a fundamental inversion of the world's values and practice, the principal agents of the world's transformation.

In modern times the call to exercise an option for the poor has been articulated especially in the Latin American Church. John Paul II has taken up this call, affirming its validity and appropriateness for the whole church in his encyclical, *On Social Concerns*. The Pope tells us that the community of Jesus' followers, the Church, should stand side by side with the victims of injustice as part of its continuing mission through history to proclaim, celebrate and serve the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **The theology of justice**

In the past 25 years the Church's message of liberation has been increasingly proclaimed in the light of biblical revelation. It is not possible here to provide a comprehensive survey of the theology of justice because of the size of the task involved. It is possible, however, to point to five basic themes:

#### **1. The Exodus event**

Israel understood itself as having been born as a nation out of the experience of the Exodus, that is, liberation from the personal, religious, social, political and economic oppression of Egypt. The

meaning of the Exodus for Israel (and for us) is that God reveals himself as God in the liberation of an oppressed people. God is a God of compassion who hears the cry of his people. He does not stand separate and aloof from human history, is not simply concerned in the after-life in which all suffering will be absent and all injustices righted. No. God intervenes in history on behalf of all the oppressed and the suffering to set them free in this life, in the here and now and concreteness of their history. He is the Lord of Creation, God-who-made-us, who remains intimately involved with creation, thereby revealing himself to be also the Lord of History, God-with-us.

## **2. Within Israel itself**

God brings justice to the oppressed, champions the poor and heeds the cry of the defenceless (Ps.76:9; 103:6; 9:10-12; Ezekiel 34:27 and many others). The prophets continually remind Israel that what God desires most is justice. Prominent among these are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea and Micah (Is.1:23, 3:14-15; Jr. 21:12; 22:3, 13; Ho. 4:1-2; Am. 5:7-17; Mi 6:2-12 and many others).

## **3. Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God**

God's purpose for humanity is a new heaven and a new earth, a kingdom of justice and peace as well as holiness and grace, a time of both social and personal fulfilment.

Jesus' purpose was precisely to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom and the need for conversion, a turning around of our lives, a turning upside-down of the world's values. Unless so converted we cannot receive the gift of God's kingdom.

Luke, in his Gospel, has Jesus say this at the beginning of his public ministry.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind.

To set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the successful liberty of the Lord.

God's message, according to Luke, is aimed particularly (though not exclusively) at the poor, the outcast, the afflicted. It is a message of liberation, of freedom from everything which militates against the fullness of life.

Read again the Beatitudes – they are a summary statement of the values of the Kingdom. Reflect on how they overturn the wisdom of the world and offend commonsense. The whole of the Law is summed up by Jesus in 'love of God and love of neighbour', a love which encompasses both love of ourselves and of our enemies.

Because God's Kingdom is coming, Jesus asks us to repent, to turn around, to change. We do this by living according to the values of the Kingdom, that is, by the rules which will definitively characterise God's future. In doing this we enable the future to be active as a leaven in the present and prepare ourselves for God's great gift of a new heaven and a new earth.

## **4. Jesus' conflict with the authorities**

Jesus ate with public sinners and with the outcasts of Jewish society and he identified with them. In fact, he made eternal life dependent on how we treat the least and rejected among us. This was a scandal to any devout Jew at that time because it was believed that the situation of the outcasts (for example, poverty, illness, handicap) was a direct consequence of their sins. That is why they were social outcasts, because they were in the first place God's outcasts. In extending table

fellowship to outcasts, in accepting them as his followers, Jesus was not only undermining a basic religious belief but also an established social practice buttressed by centuries of 'commonsense'.

Jesus revised the Sabbath observance by healing on the Sabbath and by arguing that the Sabbath was made for people and not people for the Sabbath. The Sabbath observance was a foundation stone of Jewish belief. It was one of the commandments. Together with circumcision it was one of the distinguishing characteristics of Israel, one of the qualities that made Israel what it was, a nation set apart by and for God. The Sabbath therefore was both a political and cultural, as well as religious, reality. Again, what Jesus had said and done would have been experienced as scandalous by any devout Jew.

The Israel of Jesus' time was a theocracy, a form of government in which a god is perceived to be the ultimate ruler. This means that at the time of Jesus religion and politics were inextricably linked. The religious leadership was also the political leadership. To attack one was to attack the other. Jesus issued strong condemnations of some leading groups, for example, the Pharisees and Sadducees, accusing them of self-righteousness, of being blind to what was happening in his own person, of being more concerned with the letter than the spirit of the Law.

An analysis of Jesus' conflict with the authorities and society of his time reveals that his mission was concerned with the total transformation of this world, social and political aspects included. It is clear that to be a follower of Jesus entails confrontation of the powers of this world when these do not reflect the values of the Kingdom.

## **5. The option for the poor**

We have already noted how in the Old Testament God was experienced as someone who was on the side of the poor. Jesus continues in this tradition by associating with the poor and by accepting them among his followers. Jesus, however, goes further than this by aiming his message at the poor and rejected and by identifying with them. According to Matthew 25: 31-46, to stand beside the poor and to identify with them is to render the same service to Jesus himself and to merit eternal life with God.

## **How Do We Understand Justice in the World?**

The social teaching of the Catholic Church is an interpretation of reality made in the light of the Gospel, its own tradition and human wisdom. How, then, does Catholic social teaching interpret the world?

According to *Gaudium et Spes* (Second Vatican Council, 1965), humanity is confronted by a fundamental choice between progress or retreat, freedom or slavery, solidarity or division and hatred. The world is on a grip of a series of paradoxes: despite technological and scientific advancement there is widespread illiteracy and hunger; despite a greater awareness of and desire for freedom, there are new forms of social and psychological slavery.

The 1971 Synod of Bishops stated that the world suffers from

A network of domination, oppression and abuses which stifle freedom and which keep the greater part of humanity from sharing in the building up and enjoyment of a more just world. (*Justice in the World*, n 3)

The Synod noted that power in the world was increasingly concentrated in the hands of small controlling groups. It also noted that although liberation was ultimately a liberation from sin, unjust social structures place objective obstacles in the way of conversion of hearts. It follows that the work for justice must encompass both personal conversion and social change. Furthermore, the

Synod warns, justice cannot simply mean exporting the way of life of richer countries to poorer countries because if the high rates of consumption and pollution of the industrialised world, both East and West, were extended to the whole of humankind, irreparable damage would be done to the essential elements of life on earth.

Pope John Paul II has so far (1990) written three encyclicals on social themes. He has warned that humanity is increasingly under threat from the products of its own hands. Ethical and spiritual development is lagging behind technological advance. We have forgotten the priority of ethics over technology, the primacy of the person over things, the precedence of labour over capital. So urgent is the present world situation regarding poverty that it calls into question the various economic institutions and structures that support the current world economy. 'Essential transformations' are required.

In his social encyclical, *On Social Concerns*, John Paul II argues that global solidarity is a precondition for the achievement of full human liberation. This solidarity is, in the first place, a solidarity with the victims of injustice, an option for the poor. The Pope notes that the majority of the world's population is poor and states that this situation is neither inevitable nor is it the fault of the poor themselves. Poverty, says the Pope, is a scandal. It offends human dignity and contradicts the Church's belief that the world's goods belong to everyone

Together with Paul IV, John Paul II issues a strong condemnation of what he terms the *superdevelopment* of many richer countries. This is an excessive availability of all kinds of material goods which turns people into slaves of possession and immediate gratification. A correct understanding of human development goes beyond the purely economic dimension and includes a regard for human rights, a concern for a more equal distribution of goods, a respect for the natural world and the beings which constitute it and a more discerning and less uncritical approach to modern technology. We also need to reject, the Pope adds, what has become an all-consuming desire for profit and an unquestionable thirst for power.

John Paul II also points to the many positive signs in the worlds, some of which are:

- An increasing awareness of human dignity and human rights.
- A growing consciousness of being linked to a common global destiny which is to be constructed together, that is, of our interdependence on a world-wide scale.
- The widespread concern for peace.
- The growing realisation of the limits of natural resources and of the need to respect the integrity and cycles of nature.
- The success experienced by some poor countries in becoming self-sufficient in food production.

Returning to our central question, 'What can we do?' John Paul II's answer is *solidarity*. The Pope uses this word in a way which climaxes and summarises one hundred years of Catholic social teaching. What is solidarity?

It is neither a vague compassion nor a shallow distress at misfortune, but a determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is, to working for those social, economic, political, cultural and environmental conditions which will enable all human beings to reach their maximum potential. Minimum conditions include the implementation of basic human rights, greater equality in the distribution of goods and services, the abolition of all forms of discrimination and measures for environmental protection.

It involves an option for the poor, a willingness to stand beside all victims of injustice, to work with and for them, to see the world through their eyes.

It includes a willingness and readiness on the part of those better-off to share their wealth and their power.

It includes the abandonment of passivity on the part of the poor. The poor and oppressed have a duty to practise solidarity among themselves and to claim their legitimate rights. Our own solidarity should, in the first place, be at the service of solidarity among the poor themselves.

Solidarity involves the abandonment of the politics of 'blocs', of division, and the growth of trust and collaboration. The unity of humankind is the ultimate goal.

### **Action for Justice: Different Models**

There are many ways to work for justice. In the Catholic tradition there have been, and continue to be, two basic models of work in the social area. One is sometimes called the *social welfare* model. Those working within this framework are primarily concerned with alleviating the pain and suffering caused by a variety of life-events, including injustice. Examples of such work include medicine and nursing, counselling, social and welfare work. The focus here is on the individual person and, at times, the small group. This model has been the most widely adopted and best-known among Catholics until fairly recently.

The other model is sometimes known as the *social change* model. Those working within this framework are primarily concerned with eliminating the causes of suffering and injustice. Examples of such work include education, research and lobbying, vigils and marches, letter-writing, participation in political parties and action groups. The concern is with social, political, cultural and economic change and, therefore, the focus tends to be on the institution, social structure, community or State. Most Catholics are either not well acquainted with this form of social assistance or do not identify it as flowing out of the Gospel.

We are particularly concerned to affirm the validity, necessity and importance of both social welfare and social change approaches. Both find their origin in the words and actions, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Both need to remain open to the other and to live in creative tension with each other.

Working to alleviate the pain and hurt of the victims of injustice and suffering is absolutely required by the Gospel. Those involved in this crucial ministry need to remain open to the reality that much of the pain they seek to alleviate has social causes, causes which ultimately need to be addressed. Were this ministry to be closed to the social perspective, it would itself constitute a kind of injustice.

Working to eliminate the causes of injustice is absolutely required by the Gospel. Those involved in this crucial ministry need to remain open to the reality that it is always people who hurt in the particularity and brokenness of their physical, emotional and spiritual lives. Were this ministry to be closed to the truth of the subjective and personal dimension, it would degenerate into a dehumanised ideology ultimately manipulating people and events in the name of lifeless abstractions.

The Church, in its mission to proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel, requires both kinds of ministries, both welfare and change perspectives. The Church, and the world, needs both its Mother Teresas to give bread to the hungry and its Helder Camaras to ask why the poor are hungry.

## **What Can We Do?**

### **Hope**

To act is to hope. Despite the presence of much personal and communal suffering in the world, and despite frequent feelings of doubt and powerlessness, most people continue to act in loving, courageous and compassionate ways in at least some areas of their lives. This is in itself a sign of hope, albeit of a hope that is often hidden, implicit, unnamed.

For a Christian, hope is ultimately anchored in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The event of the Resurrection declares that when all hope is seemingly lost, when we have done the best we can and have apparently failed, when we have loved and been rejected, when we have been treated unjustly and have found no recourse, when we have finally been abandoned, when all this has happened and more, God will have the last word. Why? Because God is God and his intentions for humankind will not be thwarted in the end. The Resurrection is both the sign and guarantee of this truth.

There are also many signs of hope for those with eyes to see. There is the abolition of slavery in many countries, an age-old institution supported for centuries by powerful social, cultural, political and economic forces. There was the historic success of the Trade Union movement in Britain in curbing the excesses of the Industrial Revolution. The women's movement has led to the enactment of legislation in a number of countries which has begun to redress discrimination suffered by women for centuries and, just as importantly, has led to long-overdue changes in attitudes. The conservation movement all over the world has also led to many critical changes in attitudes, personal behaviour and legislation.

Perhaps most strikingly of all in the Australian context is the fact that despite all the suffering and injustice inflicted on Aboriginal people on the part of a powerful dominant culture, Aborigines have survived. They have, in fact, not only survived but are currently engaged in a process of social, cultural, economic and political reconstruction which constitutes a victory of life over all the forces of death and dissolution.

Not everything done or said in the name of these various movements is beyond criticism of course. It is nevertheless true that much injustice and suffering have been alleviated as a result of their entry into history.

### **The Importance of the Ordinary and Everyday**

It is possible to misunderstand what we have just said. It is possible to misunderstand how change happens in the world. We have a tendency, often reinforced and magnified by the mass media, to see change primarily as the result of the activities of 'great' individuals. We remember the leaders of social movements, a Martin Luther King or Mahatma Ghandi or an Emily Pankhurst or Caroline Chisholm. We forget the equally important role played by countless millions of other human beings throughout history.

This tendency on our part to emphasise and remember the single great individual has a number of negative consequences. Possibly the most significant of these is the fact that we tend to forget what we can do in the ordinariness of our lives. Feeling small, we feel powerless. Often isolated, we feel insignificant. We forget that the great movements of change in human history were, and continue to be, only possible because millions of people supported them by living them on a daily

basis through countless small and seemingly insignificant acts of hope, courage and endurance. The history of the Christian Church is itself a good example of this truth.

The great majority of human lives have been, and will continue to be ordinary lives. The world judges such lives to be unimportant, of no consequence. The way of the world, however, is not God's way. God's purposes through history are achieved primarily through the ordinary and weak things of the world.

Mary's *Magnificat* is an excellent example of how God turns values and expectations upside-down. Mary proclaims that the mighty will fall from their thrones and the lowly will be exalted. Elsewhere in the Gospels the blind are made to see, whilst the powerful and wise are declared blind. It is the poor and rejected who hear and respond to the Good News. The poor, the merciful, those who mourn, those who seek justice and peace are declared blessed, rather than the rich, the arrogant and the tough. The barren gives birth. The poor and the outcast are made the criterion for entry into life with God.

In addition, the core principle of Catholic theology, the Principle of Sacramentality, declares that the finite and created is the vehicle through which the Infinite and Divine expresses itself. In the sacraments, the mystery of God reaches out and embraces us through the ordinary substances of water and oil, bread and wine. Outside of the sacraments everyday things, such as a gift or attentive listening or friendship in the face of ridicule or opposition, are all ways in which God's care and compassion may be communicated.

The truth is that everything we do matters, however small or insignificant it may seem on the surface. There is only one condition for this truth to be active: whatever we do must be inspired and guided by the values of the Kingdom. These, as we have previously indicated, are found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (also known as The Beatitudes).

Whatever we do in this spirit, however small, will be gathered by God in the fullness of time and turned into a tide that the powers of this world will not be able to withstand.

## **Some Guidelines for Action**

The following guidelines are for action for justice and derived from our understanding of the Gospel and Church teaching and from reflection on our own experience in the work for justice. Our intention here is to encourage action whilst pointing to both its possibilities and necessary limits.

1. Before taking action we should engage in a process of discernment which always includes prayer and may also include reading, discussion and consultation. The key here is to discern the way in which God is calling each of us in the particular circumstances of our own lives. This discernment is a continuing process which will lead to an increasing ability to hear God's word and to respond to it.
2. Any action we undertake needs to be characterised by an option for the poor and guided by the principle of solidarity as elucidated by John Paul II. Practically, this implies a standing with the poor and outcast rather than a doing something for approach. It implies being open to the truth that we will learn more than we can teach, receive more than we give. It implies the inadmissibility of a relationship based on dependence. Perhaps most difficult of all, it implies a willingness on our part not to be in control, to accept that ultimately those with whom we stand can, must and will free themselves.
3. The world has already been redeemed. (Do we really believe that?) Our actions are a participation in that redemption and not its cause.

4. The Kingdom, the new heaven and new earth to come, is God's gracious gift. We work for it by way of preparing ourselves for it. We do not cause the kingdom to come.
5. We prepare ourselves for the coming of the Kingdom by working for both personal and social change, by both assisting the victims of injustice and addressing the causes of injustice.
6. We are responsible for acting, and for doing so in an intelligent, prudent and courageous manner according to our capacity and circumstances. But we need to leave the ultimate meaning and consequences of our actions in God's hands.
7. Expect misunderstanding, conflict, failure as well as success and fulfilment. Seek the support and friendship of others with a similar commitment to justice.
8. Act locally but think globally. No issue is so small that it has no bearing on the future of the world and no issue is so large that it has no impact on our personal lives. We act where we find ourselves, increasingly aware as we grow in experience and insight, of the intricate interconnections between the local and the global, between the part and the whole.
9. Grab the nearest edge of an issue. It does not really matter which issue since they are all important and are all ultimately linked. Simply do what is possible for you – that is all God asks since it is the only thing you can do. What you may find after a while is that the field of possibilities expands as you grow in confidence and in your openness to God.
10. Remember that we all have different gifts. This is sometimes forgotten in the work for justice. You have a responsibility to contribute according to your gifts. Conversely, do not criticise others for not exercising gifts they do not possess. We are all asked to do something but there is a tendency sometimes to pressure both ourselves and others into doing everything.
11. Exercise humility as well as confidence in your gifts, abilities and insights. Respect what you are able to contribute but remain open to the possibility that you may be wrong.
12. Beware of self-righteousness – it is a condition to which we are all prey. Do not think that your work for justice makes you more acceptable in God's eyes or morally superior to those who have not yet begun the journey on which you have already embarked.
13. Begin your work for justice now. Jesus' call has a sense of urgency about it. Your decision to act will change the world. Believe this, for it is true.

### **What Can We Do In Everyday Life? Some Practical Suggestions**

The world of everyday life, the ordinary world of our immediate experience, is made up for most people of some combination of home, school, work and local community.

The work for justice begins here. Though some will be called by God to venture into wider realms, for most, the immediate worlds of home, school, work and neighbourhood will remain the principal arenas for action. This ordinary work is of the utmost importance in God's plan of salvation. It is hoped that the suggestions made in this section will encourage and enable those ready to respond to begin their journey for justice.

## At home

- Encourage children to express their views, opinions, perspectives. This will teach them to think for themselves, an important quality in a world in which powerful forces relentlessly seek our approval and acquiescence. It will also teach them to have a healthy respect both for their own views and those of others. How can we act if we do not consider our views worthwhile? And how can we act non-violently unless we similarly consider the positions of others?
- Discuss television programmes and advertisements in the home. What values are being promoted? What view of life is being projected? What techniques are being used to convince us? Explore these questions without preaching but at the same time being clear about your own values.
- Encourage children to see things from the perspective of another: what does the world look like from that person's position? Genuine compassion is not possible without our being able to walk in the shoes of others. Older children will enjoy watching and discussing the film *To Kill A Mockingbird*, a very useful resource in this area.
- Organise prayers for justice, either incorporating them into prayers at meal times or around special occasions. Such special occasions may be :
  - Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, the feast of a child's patron saint.
  - Financial donations to a charity or justice group. Discuss the work of that organisation in a way appropriate to the ages of those in the household.
  - Major news events. Examples may be the freeing of Nelson Mandela, the end of the Berlin Wall, the assassinations of workers for justice.
  - A child's school project on a famous person whose life was devoted to service. Examples are Caroline Chisholm, Martin Luther King, Lech Walesa, Mum Shirl.  
Keep the prayer service simple in order to maintain children's interest and attention: a song, a lighted candle, a brief talk and simple prayers from the heart.
- Accept differences and conflict as a normal, healthy part of family life. Resolve conflict in a manner which respects all those involved. Good conflict-resolution skills are gifts which will remain with a child in the adult years. They are absolutely essential skills in the work for justice and their roots lie in the life of a person's family of origin.
- Develop a regular programme of contributions to a charity or justice organisation of your choice. Examples are St Vincent de Paul Society, Caritas Australia, the Smith Family, Community Aid Abroad, the Freedom From Hunger Campaign, Austcare, Amnesty International, the Australian Conservation Foundation and many others.
- Undertake volunteer work with a charity, justice group or neighbourhood agency. Even young children are able to participate in work such as stapling and collating.
- Purchase tea from the World Development Tea Cooperative. This initiative represents an effective and innovative attempt to do something about international trade practices which currently harm poorer countries.
- Meet together with another family once or twice a year for a joint prayer session with a justice theme.
- Write a letter to someone in public life who acts or speaks on justice issues in a manner consistent with your beliefs. Obtain comments from other family members and incorporate them into the letter prior to sending it.

- Inform yourself on the basic facts around one issue of concern to you.
- Practise hospitality, a fundamental Christian virtue, especially in relation to the lonely or hurt or rejected in your area. Fostering a child is a particularly generous and effective form of hospitality.
- Practise attentive listening, especially in relation to those in pain. Listening which really attends to the other is both a form of hospitality and a walking in someone else's shoes. It is the kind of listening which heals much.
- Begin to consider the possibility of a simpler lifestyle in relation to energy consumption, type and quality of goods purchased, type and quantity of food consumed. Participate in recycling programmes in your area.
- Decide on what standard of living is both fair and sufficient for you at present and commit yourself to not seek to improve it. In doing so you will be resisting the temptation and false promises of materialism and conspicuous consumption.

(A number of the suggestions in this section come from Michael True's book *Homemade Social Justice*.)

### **At school**

- Devote one week each year to a specific focus on justice.
- Organise a contest on a justice theme and ask for relevant poems, posters, essays.
- Incorporate justice themes in whole-school and class liturgies.
- Organise a tree-planting ceremony to commemorate an important event or person relevant to the work of justice.
- Use educational materials developed by organisations such as the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, Caritas Australia and Community Aid Abroad. Diocesan Education Offices have a wide range of excellent materials in the justice, peace and development areas.
- Discuss television programmes and advertisements (see above note on the same suggestion for the home).
- Invite speakers from charities and justice groups to address students. Some schools have based a whole day around a group visit from such speakers.
- Devote some staff development days to an examination of justice within the school.
- Develop a community service programme.
- Incorporate justice concerns into the curriculum.

### **At work**

- If in management:

- i. ensure the development and implementation of safe work practices, anti-discrimination policies, Equal Employment Opportunity legislation, realistic and fair job descriptions, and fair work contracts
  - ii. remember the priority of people over things and therefore never treat workers simply as a factor of production
  - iii. extend your solidarity to the poor or outcast in your workplace.
- If an employee:
    - i. play an active role in your union
    - ii. ensure the development and implementation of safe work practices, anti-discrimination policies, Equal Employment Opportunity legislation, realistic and fair job descriptions, and fair work contacts
    - iii. provide a fair day's work
    - iv. do whatever you can to ensure that workers are not treated as simply another factor of production
    - v. extend your solidarity to the poor or outcast in your workplace.

### **In your local community**

- Most local communities in Australia have Neighbourhood Centres or Neighbourhood Houses (the names differ in different States). These centres usually provide a range of much-needed services and often act to bring to the attention of Local, State and Commonwealth Governments the needs of the local area. Volunteers are always required to contribute to either the provision of a service or the running of the centre itself.
- Invite a speaker from a justice organisation to address a meeting of people you know in your neighbourhood.
- Who are the poor and outcast in your area? Extend your hospitality and solidarity to them.
- If with young children, either join or organise a playgroup. Discuss with other parents the needs in your area, for example, child-care needs or recreational needs for both younger children and adolescents. Many a successful campaign for just such resources has begun in a similarly 'humble' manner.
- Join the St Vincent de Paul Society.
- Begin a social justice group in your area by bringing together people you know who are interested in a particular issue (local or global). Begin by simply seeking the basic facts pertaining to that issue. Contact one of the existing justice groups or community organisations to assist you in the initial phase of your group's development.
- Seek out the local Aboriginal community organisations and indicate your solidarity with them.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, here are two metaphors, or images, to encourage you and sustain you in your journey for justice.

The first is that of a small, fragile flower, perhaps a daisy, growing through a crack in concrete. The work for justice is often like that, small groups of people conscious of both their smallness and the magnitude of the powers ranged against them, nevertheless persisting in hope. And then the seemingly impossible happens.

The second is that of a snowflake, as in the following story:

‘Tell me the weight of a snowflake’, a coal-mouse asked a wild dove.

‘Nothing more than nothing’, was the answer.

‘In that case I must tell you a marvellous story’, the coal-mouse said. ‘I sat on the branch of a fir, close to its trunk, when it began to snow, not heavily, not in a raging blizzard, no, just like in a dream, without any violence. Since I didn’t have anything better to do, I counted the snowflakes settling on the twigs and needles of my branch. Their number was exactly 2,741,952. When the next snowflake dropped onto the branch – nothing more than nothing, as you say – the branch broke off.’

Having said that the coal-mouse flew away.

The dove, since Noah’s time an authority on the matter, thought about the story for a while and finally said to herself: ‘Perhaps there is only one person’s voice lacking for justice and peace to come about in the world.’

(Adapted from *A Race to Nowhere*, Pax Christi.)

## Study Questions

1. *This is what Yahweh asks of you: Only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God.* (Micah 6:8)

Micah, a prophet of the Old Testament, names the *three* essential elements of the Christian mission.

- In what ways is this Christian mission lived out among those you know: family, friends, schoolmates, parishioners?

2. We are called to live by 'an interpretation of reality in the light of the Gospel, the Church's tradition and human wisdom.' (Page 3)

- Choose *one* particular issue: housing, street kids, racism, mortgages, etc., which is important to your group. Inform yourselves about it. Study the information you gather. How is it related to the Gospel vision, to Christian values? Talk through what you each see as injustices in it. What would make things more just? How can you better inform yourselves about relevant Catholic social teaching? What first individual or group steps can be taken towards change for the better?

3. What strikes each of you in the group as important among the seven Basic Principles of Catholic Social Teaching?

- Get each person in the group to take one of the Principles and prepare a one minute talk on how it relates to everyday life in his or her everyday situation.

4. The option for the Poor in Principle 7 (page 5). It is outlined again in *The Theology of Justice*, (N.V.P.)

- Is the Option for the Poor really an option? Discuss.

5. Both Old and New Testaments see justice as a setting free, a building up to fullness of life (Kingdom), a bringing about of necessary changes in our own lives and in the society in which we live.

- Read and discuss how the prophets challenge us to this in the passages listed under 2 (*Within Israel Itself*, Page 6)

or

- Listen to the Peter Kearney tape, *Turn It All Around* (Collins Dove). What is the challenge to us in our everyday lives of any two or three of these songs?

6. Read *Jesus' Conflict with the Authorities*, 4. Reread the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11, Luke 6:20-23)

- How does Jesus challenge people towards a more just way of living and a more just society?

7. Discuss what you understand by 'Solidarity'.

- Basic Principles, p.12 and
- How do we understand justice in the world, para 6.

8. The Prophet Jeremiah is sent by God 'to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.' (Jer. 1:10) We can in working for justice sometimes let the need to 'destroy and overthrow' the unjust take over, and forget the more positive directive 'to build and to plant'.

- How, in our ordinary everyday lives can we build on the more positive signs Pope John Paul II mentions? (*How we understand justice in the world*, page 7).

9. Research the social welfare models of fighting injustice that are already in place and in action in your parish. Have you a local Mother Teresa?

Research the social welfare agencies in place in your local community. In what ways do Church and local community agencies collaborate, interact and support one another?

Can your group see ways improved resource and service sharing could happen?

10. Research the origins of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Have you a local Frederic Ozanam?

Are there groups working for social change in your area – church groups, local government groups, neighbourhood houses etc?

Invite a speaker from a social change group to tell you about their work.

11. What do *you* see as the advantages and limitations of social welfare, and of social change? What is needed if each is to be effective and to enrich the other?

12. Read the section: *Hope*, (Page 10)

Take some time to reflect on what is important in this section for you.

- Ask yourself, what are your own hopes in life: for yourself? your family? the world?
- Describe a picture of a world in which your vision of justice is realised.
- What changes will be necessary to bring this picture to reality?
- Take one thing you think is needed and work out what will be your first step towards this change. Take this step!

13. Listen to the Peter Kearney song, 'The Magnificat', (*Turn It All Around*).

- What is emphasised in the refrain of the song?
- Share stories of the courage, endurance, loyalty, compassion and love of the small and little ones in your life and the stories of ordinary people that you know:
  - a husband who nurses his wife who is dying of cancer;
  - a retiree who drives a bus so that shut-ins can have a chance to leave their four walls;
  - your own story?

14. Read carefully the paragraph on Sacramentality, *The importance of the ordinary and everyday*, (Page 10).

- A gift, attentive listening, friendship in the face of ridicule and opposition. What makes these things sacramentals in our lives?

15. Read: *Some Guidelines for Action*, (Page 11).

- Discuss in the group what each means for you before going on to the suggested actions. This may take some time, but meaning and understanding will be widened and deepened for each member of the group.

16. *At Home*

- Choose together a starting point among the suggestions for family action. Plan as a family. Share out responsibilities for making it happen. Ask
  - What needs doing?
  - Who will do it?
  - When will it be done?
  - How will it be done?
  - What are your hopes about this action?
- Use television as an example. You could:
  - select programs to watch together as a family.
  - set particular times/nights.
  - watch *one* program at a time, followed by discussion of what's good and what's not.
  - take some action together. E.g.: Write a letter of praise/criticism according to what the family concludes about the program.
- If you use Prayers for Justice as an example
  - all family members could contribute to a collection of good justice prayers.
  - write his or her own general prayers.
  - find local and society issues from TV or newspapers, about which members want to pray.
- To make this work, share out responsibility for organisation, choose a regular time and check that preparation has been done.

You would follow the prayer by discussion and suggestions for action.