

Justicia in Mundo, Justice in the World

Statement of the Synod of Bishops, 1971

This document is available on the Vatican Web Site: www.vatican.va.

OVERVIEW

The 1971 Synod of Bishops, in their reflection on “the mission of the People of God to further justice in the world,” affirms the right to a culturally-sensitive, personalized development. The Bishops teach that Gospel principles mandate justice for the liberation of all humanity as an essential expression of Christian love. The Church must witness for justice through its own lifestyle, educational activities, and international action. Structural sin is discussed.

HISTORICAL NOTE

This document illustrates the powerful influence of native leadership of the Churches of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It is the first major example of post-Vatican II episcopal collegiality and reflects a forceful, concrete, and realistic refinement of previous papal pronouncements.

DOCUMENT OUTLINE

Introduction

- Structural injustices oppress humanity and stifle freedom to operate in the world (#3).
- The dynamism of the Gospel and the hopes of the people of today are together (#5).
- “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).

Justice and World Society

- A modern paradox:
 - forces for achieving human dignity seem strong (#7);
 - but so do forces of division (arms race, economic injustices, lack of participation) (#9).
- Affirms the right to development as a basic human right (#15).
- Calls for personalization and a culturally-sensitive modernization (#’s 17-19).
- Many who suffer injustice are voiceless; the Church should speak on their behalf (#20).
- Injustices listed: those to migrants, refugees; religious persecution; human rights violations; torture; political prisoners; anti-life; war; dishonest media; anti-family activity (#’s 21-26).
- Dialogue with the participation of all, especially youth, is needed to correct these injustices (#28).

Gospel Message and Mission of Christ

- Scriptural Sources
 - People need to listen to the Word of God to respond effectively to injustices (#29).
 - Old Testament views God as a “liberator of the oppressed and the defender of the poor” (#30).
 - Jesus gave himself for the salvation and liberation of all and associated himself with the “least” (#31).
 - St. Paul: Christian life is the faith which sparks love and service of neighbors (#33).



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DOCUMENT OUTLINE (continued)

- Justice and Love
 - “Christian love of neighbor and justice cannot be separated” (#34).
 - Preaching the Gospel requires a dedication to the liberation of humanity in this world (#35).
- Role of the Church
 - The Gospel message gives the Church the right and duty to proclaim justice on all levels and to denounce instances of injustice (#36).
 - The role of the hierarchical Church is not to offer concrete solutions to specific problems, but to promote the dignity and rights of each human being (#37).

Practice of Justice

- Witness of the Church
 - Anyone who ventures to preach justice should be perceived as being just (#40).
 - Rights within the Church must be respected for all, especially women and lay people (#43).
 - Rights include: decent wage, security, promotion, freedom of thought and expression, proper judicial procedures, participation in decision-making process (#’s 45-46).
 - The lifestyle of the institutional Church and all its members must allow it to preach the good news to the poor (#48).
- Education to Justice
 - In developing countries, the aim is to awaken awareness of the concrete situation and strategies and alternatives for change (#51).
 - Family is the principal agent for this education, a continuing one (#54).
 - Catholic social teaching, the basic principles of the Gospels applied, is the major source for justice education (#56).
 - Liturgy and the sacraments can serve justice education (#58).
- Cooperation between Churches in Rich and Poor Nations Is Essential for Economic and Spiritual Progress (#59).
- Ecumenical Collaboration for Justice Is Strongly Supported (#61).
- International Action
 - Call for the UN Declaration of Human Rights to be ratified by all nations (#64).
 - Support UN efforts to halt arms race, weapons trade, and reach peaceful conflict resolution (#65).
 - Foster aims of the Second Development Decade, including fair prices for raw materials, opening of markets, taxation on worldwide basis (#66).
 - Concentration of power should be changed; more participation is needed (#67).
 - Emphasizes the importance of UN specialized agencies in promoting justice (#68).
 - Calls for funding for responsible development (#69).
 - Wealthy nations need to be less materialistic and consume less (#70).
 - Right to development and respectful cooperation with wealthy nations are urged (#71).

A Word of Hope

- Christians will find the Kingdom as the fruit of their nature and efforts; God is now preparing the Kingdom (#75).

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Discussion Questions

Name the major reasons that prompt you to work for justice.

List factors in your country that foster work for justice and factors that hinder it.

Discuss how your faith in Jesus encourages you to do more for justice and peace.

