Action for Justice

Teacher Background

“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.” Justice in the World, Synod of Bishops 1971, (#6)

The quotation above from an important document of Catholic social teaching highlights the importance that the Catholic Church places on its members being active in the world in striving to bring about more just and more human conditions in which the dignity of human beings is acknowledged and supported. Situations of injustice and human oppression need to be identified, reflected upon, prayed about and acted on.

Action for justice can take many forms. Educational activity can promote examination of the foundations and principles of justice in the Scriptures, in the social teaching of the Church and in the wisdoms derived human reflection on social living. Direct or mediated activity promoting contact with situations of injustice can raise awareness and consciousness of injustice affecting individuals, groups and the very structures of society itself. Advocacy on behalf of marginalised and disempowered groups is another form of action for justice. Protest marches, rallies, letter writing campaigns, political action, lobbying, civil disobedience, street drama and media campaigns are further tangible ways in which action for justice may be expressed.

Action for justice may entail group activity designed to promote consciousness of particular justice issues and action in relation to such issues. Thus action groups may form to promote reflection and action on issues involving refugees or on pollution of the environment. The Judaeo-Christian Scriptures and the social teaching of the Church may explicitly inspire the activity of justice groups or such activity may derive from other religious sources or from broad humanitarian principles or some combination of sources.

Groups engaging in action for justice need to reflect on their own structures and ways of acting the justice that they are endeavouring to bring about in the broader society. Thus, for example, a Christian institution that tolerated serious injustice in its own structures, yet urged the righting of injustice by a civil institution would be seen as hypocritical and the force of its critique and exhortation would be lessened.