

 CCK Anti-Racism Initiative

THE CALL TO  
RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE  
IN THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

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# A DIALOGUE ON SOCIAL JUSTICE WITH THE BIBLE AND POPE FRANCIS



**The Bible and Pope Francis: Beacons of hope for a pilgrim Church.**

## **A DESCRIPTION**

Social Justice is a process, not an outcome, which (1) seeks fair (re)distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities; (2) challenges the roots of oppression and injustice; (3) empowers all people to exercise self-determination and realize their full potential; (4) and builds social solidarity and community capacity for collaborative action. (School of Social Welfare of the University of California at Berkeley)

**GUIDING OUR JOURNEY: WHY THE  
BIBLE -- A PUBLIC VOICE AND A  
PERSONAL COMPANION**

*The Bible does not offer revealed morality but revealed reality and tells **us the kinds of people we are to become** (emphasis mine) if we are to hear its message faithfully (James Gustafson)*

# FUNDAMENTAL BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

- A. God is interested in this world, here and now.**
- B. The fundamental proclamation of Jesus is the arrival of God's Reign or kingdom**
- C. Concern for the poor and the marginal as well as for the danger of riches is pervasive in the Bible.**
- D. The Gospel challenges us to break through the religious and social barriers of our time.**

## **GOD IS INTERESTED IN THIS WORLD, HERE AND NOW**

The biblical doctrine of creation is not about *the origin* of the world, but about *its purpose*. Genesis 1:1-2:4 is punctuated by the refrain, “and God saw that it was good”. This is a blessing. Some obvious implications of Gen 1:1-2:4a are (1) the response to creation is reverence and praise, not exploitation, (2) humanity shares a solidarity with both the inanimate and animate world in owing its existence to the word of God; (3) Gen 1:27, “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” “Image of God”= bearer of God’s presence; fundamental basis of human dignity. Other expressions of this: “The earth is the Lord’s and its fullness” (Ps. 24:1); men and women crowned with honor and glory have dominion over the work of the Lord’s hands (Ps. 8:5).

## POPE FRANCIS

“ I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be 'protectors' of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.” (Laudato Si )

## POPE FRANCIS

Today too, amid so much darkness, we need to see the light of hope and to be men and women who bring hope to others. To protect creation, to protect every man and every woman, to look upon them with tenderness and love, is to open up a horizon of hope; it is to let a shaft of light break through the heavy clouds; it is to bring the warmth of hope! (Homily for inaugural Mass of Petrine Ministry, March 19, 2013.)

## THE FUNDAMENTAL PROCLAMATION OF JESUS IS THE ARRIVAL OF GOD'S REIGN OR KINGDOM

...and the call to disciples to be with him and share his mission (Mark 1:16-20). It is manifest in works of power on behalf of suffering or marginalized people (Matt 4:23; 12:22-30). The Christian prays, “thy kingdom come; thy will be done **on earth** as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Jesus announces and symbolizes the presence of the kingdom by “mighty works” which touch the suffering of people in the here and now. When Jesus calls the poor blessed “for theirs are the kingdom of heaven” he is affirming that God’s reign is for their sake.

## POPE FRANCIS

He calls his disciples and invites them to set out with him. He calls them to walk through to the city, but at a different pace; he teaches them to notice what they had previously overlooked, and he points out new and pressing needs. Repent, he tells them. The Kingdom of Heaven means finding in Jesus a God who gets involved with the lives of his people. He gets involved and involves others not to be afraid to make of our history a history of salvation (cf. Mk 1:15, 21).

## POPE FRANCIS

Jesus continues to walk and to awaken hope, a hope that frees us from empty associations and impersonal analyses. He encourages us to enter like leaven into where we are, where we live, into every corner of our daily life. The kingdom of heaven is among you, he tells us. It is there wherever we strive to show a little tenderness and compassion, wherever we are unafraid to create spaces for the blind to see, the paralyzed to walk, lepers to be cleansed and the deaf to hear (cf. Lk 7:22), so that all those we had given up for lost can enjoy the resurrection. (1/21/18)

**CONCERN FOR THE POOR AND THE  
MARGINAL AS WELL AS FOR THE  
DANGER OF RICHES IS PERVASIVE IN  
THE BIBLE**

*Texts:* Exod 23:6-13; Leviticus 19:9-15; Deut 15:7-11; Amos 2:7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:4-6 (polemic against exploitation of the poor); Zech 7:8-10 (a good summary of prophetic preaching); Isa. 3:14-15; 10:1-4; 11:1-5 (the Messianic king will take the cause of the poor); Psalm 72; Biblical texts resonate with care for four groups of people: the poor, the widow, the orphan and the stranger in the land (*ger*)

**CONCERN FOR THE POOR AND THE  
MARGINAL AS WELL AS FOR THE  
DANGER OF RICHES IS PERVASIVE IN  
THE BIBLE**

Riches and Wealth” become evil: (a) when they become idols and dominate a person’s life. Luke 12:13-21; Col 3:5, “greed which is idolatry.” (b) when they cause “blindness” so that one does not even see the poor. Luke 16:19-31 (Dives and Lazarus); Matt 25:31-46 (the constant refrain is when did we “see” you?) (c) When they become a source of dominance over others or destroy community. In Paul, economic difference destroys community: 1 Cor 11:17-21, “It is not the Lord’s supper that you eat.” ...You show contempt for and humiliate the “Have nots.”

## POPE FRANCIS

Just as the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say “thou shalt not” **to an economy of exclusion and inequality**. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized (*Joy of the Gospel*, 53.)

**THE GOSPEL CHALLENGES US TO  
BREAK THROUGH THE RELIGIOUS AND  
SOCIAL BARRIERS OF OUR TIME.**

Learning from a Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37; 17:11-19). A question, a journey, a dying person, bridging the gap between seeing and acting, “going the extra mile,” who teaches about mercy? (=in Bible, mercy is “saving help”)

## THE GOOD SAMARITAN (LK 10:29-37)

<sup>29</sup> But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. <sup>31</sup> A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. <sup>32</sup> Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. <sup>34</sup> He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.’ <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?” <sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who treated him with mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

## POPE FRANCIS

Jesus turns to the lawyer and asks him: “Which of these three — the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan — do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell victim to the robbers?”. And the lawyer, of course — because he was intelligent —, said in reply: “The one who had compassion on him” (vv. 36-37). In this way, Jesus completely overturned the lawyer’s initial perspective — as well as our own! —: I must not categorize others in order to decide who is my neighbor and who is not. It is up to me whether to be a neighbor or not — the decision is mine — it is up to me whether or not to be a neighbor to those whom I encounter who need help, even if they are strangers or perhaps hostile. And Jesus concludes, saying: “Go and do likewise” (v. 37).

(10.07.16 Angelus, St Peter's Square, Rome 15th Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year C)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Walter J Burghardt, *Justice: A Global Adventure*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004
- John R Donahue, S.J. *Seek Justice That You May Live* (Paulist 2014)
- Thomas Massaro, S.J. *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2012) and *Mercy in Action: The Social Teachings of Pope Francis* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2018)

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Genesis 1:26-27:** Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Exodus 22:20-26** "You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. 21 You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. 22 If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. 23 My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword; then your own wives will be widows, and your children orphans. 24 "If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors among my people, you shall not act like an extortioner toward him by demanding interest from him. 25 If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you shall return it to him before sunset; 26 for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body. What else has he to sleep in? If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate.

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Deuteronomy 1:16-17:** I charged your judges at that time, 'Listen to complaints among your kinsmen, and administer true justice to both parties even if one of them is an alien. In rendering judgment, do not consider who a person is; give ear to the lowly and to the great alike, fearing no man, for judgment is God's. Refer to me any case that is too hard for you and I will hear it.'

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Deut 15:7** If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. <sup>8</sup> Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs.

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Deut 27:19**, "Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the orphan or the widow." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" [These are sample references to the frequent concern in the Old Testament for the four groups of powerless people, "the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the stranger in the land."]

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Amos 5:24** But if you would offer me holocausts,  
the let justice (mishpat) surge like water,  
and goodness (sedeqah) like an unfailing stream.  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Micah 6:8** You have been told, O man, what is good,  
and what the Lord requires of you  
Only to do the right (mishpat)  
and to love goodness (chesed)  
and to walk humbly with your God.

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Hos. 2:21** I will espouse you to me forever; I will  
espouse you in right and justice  
in love and in mercy I will espouse you in  
fidelity, and you shall know the Lord.

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Isa. 1:16** Wash yourselves clean Put away your misdeeds  
from before my eyes

cease doing evil 17 Learn to do good, make  
justice your aim:

redress the wronged; hear the orphan's plea,  
defend the widow; 18 Come now, let us set  
things right, says the Lord

Though your sins be as scarlet, they may become  
as white as snow

Though they be crimson red, they may become  
white as wool

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Isa. 32:16** Then judgment will dwell in the wilderness  
and justice abide in the garden land.

**17 The work of justice will be peace;  
the effect of justice, calm and security forever**

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Jer. 22:15** Must you prove your rank among kings by competing with them in cedar?

Did not your father eat and drink He did what was right and just)

and it went well with him, 16 Because he dispensed justice to the weak and the poor

it went well with him. Is this not true knowledge of me? says the Lord.

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Matthew 6:33** “Seek first God’s reign and God’s justice”

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Matthew 12:15-21**, citing Isaiah 42:1-5 When Jesus realized this, he withdrew from that place. Many (people) followed him, and he cured them all, but he warned them not to make him known. 17 This was to fulfill what had been spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 18 "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom I delight; I shall place my spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. 19 He will not contend 12 or cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. 20 A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory. 21 And in his name the Gentiles will hope."

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Matt 25:31-46**, esp. 37-40 Then the just ones will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' 40 And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Luke 4:14-21** Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread 6 throughout the whole region. 15 He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all. 16 7 He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom 8 into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read 17 and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, 9 because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, 19 and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." (citing Isaiah 61:1-2) 20 Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. 21 He said to them, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Luke 6:20:** Then he looked up at his disciples and said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.’ (=Matt 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit”)

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Luke 12.15:** And he said to them, 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.' See **Colossians: 3:5** "greed which is idolatry"

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**Romans 15.26:** Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**James 2:** My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? 2 For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, 3 and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Have a seat here, please', while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there', or, 'Sit at my feet', 4h Have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?

## SELECT TEXTS ON JUSTICE IN THE BIBLE

**1 John 3:17** How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister\* in need and yet refuses help? **18** Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.