



## CHAPTER 5

# CHRISTIAN REFLECTION

### 1. FAITH REFLECTION

The inspiration we receive from our faith colours our way of seeing everything and the action we take. This is why Christian reflection is important throughout the Pastoral Cycle process; the depth of our commitment to Gospel values affects the way we view a situation, the analysis we do, the action plans we make and the way we implement them.

Christian Reflection allows us to look at a situation through the eyes of God as we ask ourselves: 'How does God see this situation?'

The role of this christian reflection is twofold:

- o *Evaluative* (makes judgments based on the Gospel, recognising whether the situation as sinful or graced).
- o *Directive* (rooted in Gospel values, it directs us and helps us to identify and decide on possible responses or *alternatives in the pastoral situation*).
- o This reflection allows us to make the link between faith and our action.

The Faith Reflection entails looking at the situation and the problem with a 'Christian eye.' For this we will use:

- o The Word of God (the Bible).
- o The Social Teaching of the Church (including the Pastoral Letters of the Bishops).
- o The Charism of your congregation or group and your own Scriptures (Constitutions, writing of the founders,...etc.).
- o Christian Tradition.
- o The Tradition and Values of the Community...

At this stage we will try to understand the experience we have analysed in the light of our Christian faith, the Bible, the Social Teaching and the resources of tradition. The Word of God can shine new light upon a situation, raise new questions, suggest new insights and open the way to new responses.

There is an integral link between faith and the promotion of justice. Pastoral action necessarily includes action on behalf of justice and therefore requires not only personal conversion but also commitment to social change by the changing of structures.

#### **1.1. Using the Bible**

The Bible presents to us a God who wants the happiness and well-being of all the people. He made a COVENANT (right relationship with God, with neighbour and with the world) with us.

Jesus challenged many of the sinful structures (laws, customs, practices, etc.) in his society. In doing so, he transformed the society of his time.

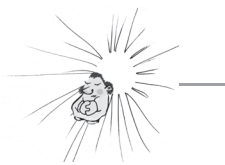
Read the Bible in community, share about it and pray with it. By doing this, we can examine an issue and analyse it in the light of the Word of God.

Choose passages of the Bible that shed light on the situation and help you to evaluate your own situation and so discern God's plan for your current reality (see suggestions below). By examining God's action in similar situations, we come to understand what He is calling us to do or to change in ours.

Read what the Bible says about the situation.

Share the meaning of this passage for you and what it means to the concrete situation you are dealing with.

Listen to what others have to say.



Pray and reflect with the Word of God.

Record meaningful passages. If a particular text is relevant and meaningful, keep a record of it and of the inspiration it gives you regarding the situation in which you find yourself. Justice is one of the richest notions in the Gospel, justice that goes beyond law. The main question at this stage is: What does GOD want in this situation?

### 1.2. Some Biblical Texts on Justice and Peace

Let us now examine some of the main texts from Scripture, to see how Justice and Peace is rooted in the Word of God; they can be used either for your own personal prayer or for group discussion.

Ex. 3: 7-10	God sees the miserable state of his people and has heard their cry, God wants to set them free and entrusts this mission to Moses.
Micah 6: 8	What God wants is that we act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly ... Micah repeats the message spoken by the other prophets of his time; justice (Amos), love (Hosea), humility before God (Isaiah); he inscribes God's message within a series of practices; justice (to act the way God wants), compassion, never forgetting that we are God's creatures (not to act as if we were God).
Isaiah 58: 5-12	God does not want empty acts of piousness; God wants a true commitment to justice. The fast that is pleasing to God is to break the chains of injustice. Message also found in Hosea 6: 6 and Jeremiah 7: 1-10.
Mt. 21: 31-46	We will be judged on the way we treated those in need; we will have ministered to God each time we cared for those who were suffering.
Lk. 10: 29-37	The Samaritan overcame his prejudices and helped his brother lying on the side of the road; he acted, then left without being thanked. Jesus uses this parable to illustrate the fact that the two commandments of loving God and serving his neighbour are inseparable.
Acts 2: 42-47	Making sure that no one was in need, sharing what they had ... this is what the early Christians did to celebrate the presence of God among them.
James 2: 1-9	It is impossible for us to say we are disciples of Christ if we exclude the poor, and if we judge people according to their social standing.

### 1.3. The Tradition of the Church

The Fathers of the Church (St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil and others) wrote and preached much about the need for each Christian to live Social Justice.

We can also look at other people who lived the Gospel values in their world and society, in order to transform it and to bring about God's will. They are part of the 'tradition and practice' of the Church and can be an inspiration for us. Look at those who have lived in a recent past or are still alive (Martin Luther King, Romero, Helder Camera, Desmond Tutu, Mandela, Muziriwa,...).

We can also find out what Christians faced with similar situations to ours have done elsewhere...

### 1.4. Our Charism

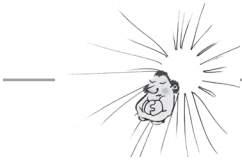


Look at your founder, at WHAT HE/SHE DID. Choose a passage where you see their action, the things they did. Read the passage.

Write down the action verbs (what he did) e.g. he wrote a letter, he visited a sick person, he crossed the Ocean...

Look at these verbs... What do they tell you about the founder?

Look at what he did then and compare this with the situation you are concerned about now... What is the 'inspiration', the 'call' you perceive for you today? What is the link between the charism of your congregation and the current situation? What would your founder have done in this situation?



The writings of your founder, congregation or institute can be an inspiration for your community. Are there any links between the current situation and the writings of your congregation?

### **1.5. Cultural Tradition**

Values, proverbs, traditional beliefs. What do they tell us about the current situation?

If you are working with communities that are not Christian, it is important to look at their tradition and values before deciding how to respond to your particular situation. The human values present in almost all cultures are equally important and relevant.

If you are working with Muslims, you can use the Qur'an or ask the Imam to tell you what the Qur'an says about this situation.

### **1.6. The Social Teaching of the Church**

Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the Popes, the Vatican and Bishops' Conferences have observed what is happening in the world and applied the Scriptures to these situations. These guidelines are what we call Catholic Social Teaching. They give us guidance for living our faith in our world and can be an inspiration for us. In this teaching we can find 'concrete ways' of living out our Christian commitment and responding to the 'signs of the times'...

We have already noted that the Prayer of the Community can be a means to analyze a situation in the light of Scripture. The Charism of our founder or congregation can also help in leading us to an appropriate response. Catholic Social Teaching is an additional valuable source of guidance.

Catholic or Church Social Teaching can be found in the following sources:

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html)

The main Social Encyclicals and Documents of the Church are available in the website of the Center of Concern – education for Justice. <http://www.educationforjustice.org/catholic-social-teaching/encyclicals-and-documents>

## **2. CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING PRINCIPLES**

**1. THE DIGNITY AND EQUALITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON** demands respect for every human life. Each human being is created in God's image. This is why each person is sacred and worthy of respect.

**2. THE PRINCIPLE OF PARTICIPATION.** The development of the person is only brought about through social interaction (working with others and in giving oneself to others). Thus participation in social processes is a fundamental human right (one that flows from the nature of the human person). Humanity is social by nature as God created human beings in relationship, in society, as a people, not as individuals. This is expressed in the African proverb, "I am because you are, and you are because I am." The fact that human beings are social by nature indicates that the betterment of the person and the improvement of society depend on each other... Humanity depends completely on life in society (Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*). Salvation – the highest form of fulfilment – is social: an ultimate communion with God and neighbour. *Sharing* is an absolute condition for human development, a matter not of charity but of justice.

**3. PROMOTION OF THE COMMON GOOD and COMMUNITY.** The common good, takes priority over the individual good. Each person has a moral obligation to order society and to foster the flourishing of all groups and persons.

The human person is both sacred and social. Human dignity and rights can only be realized and protected in relationship with others and with the wider society. How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the good of the whole society, the common good.

**4. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES.** As human beings are 'social,' in relationship, created in God's Triune image, each human being has the right to have the minimum necessary required to live a decent life, and the duty to provide for this minimum for each member of the human community.



Everyone has both the duty to contribute to human improvement and the right to enjoy the benefits coming from that improvement. The civil, political, economic and social rights such as food, education, health and work must be promoted.

**5. SOLIDARITY.** In the light of faith, there is a new model of the unity of the human race which inspires our solidarity. The needs and concerns of all in our society must shape the orientation, organisation and operation of society (economy, laws, politics, etc.) so that no one is left out. If some are left out, then everyone suffers! The final purpose of all activities is the life of the human person and the community. "It is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all ...because we are all really responsible for all". *Pope John Paul II, On Social Concern, 1987.*

**6. OPTION FOR THE POOR.** With the *Option for the poor*, the needy, marginalised, oppressed and forgotten all have a privileged position. This implies that social laws and economic activity must necessarily give priority to lifting them up and finding special solutions to their needs.

Our first concern in any situation must be: *What is happening to the poor?* The option for the poor involves seeing the social reality 'from the viewpoint of the poor' and to side with them to change that reality for their betterment.

**7. SUBSIDIARITY.** The principle of subsidiarity maintains that the decisions are taken at the lowest level of responsibility. Subsidiarity regulates how the various persons, associations and institutions in society are to interact with each other in their exercise of responsibility and solidarity. "As small as possible, as big as necessary." The principle of subsidiarity states that larger entities should not assume the roles and functions of smaller (or less powerful) ones unless it is absolutely necessary. All people have a right to a minimum level of participation in the economic, political, and cultural life of society.

**8. STEWARDSHIP OF THE GOODS OF THE EARTH.** The goods of the earth are gifts. We hold them in trust, as stewards. The goods of the earth belong to us all! All other rights, whatever they are, including property rights and the right of free trade must be subordinated to this norm and their use must benefit the common good. The Second Vatican Council says: "God destined the earth and all it contains for all people and nations so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity."

**9. INTEGRITY OF CREATION.** Each person and activity must respect the environment and promote a wise use of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations. The care and protection of life on the planet Earth (not only human beings but the whole of creation) is a priority. Creation calls for collaboration in an on-going process and a contribution towards the realization of an unfinished potential.

**10. PROMOTION OF PEACE.** Peace is not just the absence of war. To do justice, to create a just society is the basis for promoting Peace.

### 3. ETHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE ECOLOGICAL QUESTION

"Everyone has the right to life" says the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today, in a time of accelerated environmental destruction, this basic article entails an ecological dimension. When ecosystems disappear, fertile land and water basins are destroyed, fish stocks and food sources are exhausted and territories become uninhabitable, then the right to life is questioned, too. Thus environmental protection is inevitably human protection, since environmental degradation endangers human beings' living conditions and their social systems in which they organize their life.

The ecological issue poses a challenge to the churches and their social ethics. From a *justice-oriented perspective*, the current living and production methods do burden future generations, as environmental degradation generally generates long-term harmful effects. Our descendants will pay the bill for our environmental consumption. In a *global perspective*, the developing regions that have contributed the less to climate change and biodiversity loss are significantly much more affected by the consequences of environmental degradation than the industrial countries (Europe and US) that are mainly those causing the destruction. Environmental degradation affects not only the relations of human beings among themselves, but also the relationship between human beings and their natural environment. The natural system as a whole is woven by various relations, on which human beings depend, and which they also design actively. Therefore actions must be limited whenever life and the needs of other organisms are affected. From a Christian perspective a key ecological value is the 'rightful autonomy' that respects the integrity of all creatures and the intrinsic value of the whole creation.



The **Church's mission** to protect the natural resources in a sustainable way is a consequence of its **"hunger and thirst for justice"** (Matthew 5:6). And, vice versa, the global injustice, generated by environmental conflicts, is "a denial of God in practice, for it denies the dignity of the human person, the image of God, the brother or sister of Christ." Thus, the Church needs to engage more than ever in the environmental protection. This engagement makes real and concrete the Christian duty to protect human dignity, the right to life and to an integral development for all people.

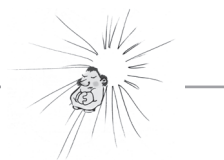
The ecological question poses a theological and spiritual challenge to the Church. Environmental degradation is linked to the relation between the human person and God and to the experience of the human person with God. Environmental issues should become a central topic of theological considerations, because they negate the Christian promise of salvation and liberation, which is addressed to the whole of creation. In a Christian perspective, creation is not simply a resource to satisfy human consumption needs, but part of a meaningful and salvific overall process. God meets the person *in the created reality, at every moment and in all things*. On this basis, nature conservation and environmental protection are integrated into a much more comprehensive values, lifestyles and social goals. Living environmental protection in our everyday reality is part of our Christian faith. The biblical texts do not focus only on humans, but on the community of all creation. Prominent religious figures like Francis of Assisi, Hildegard von Bingen, Master Eckhart show us old Christian traditions of closeness to nature that can provide environmental guidance for today's modern societies.

Viewing the community of creation as a whole, the ecological question calls the church to action: If God works through his creative spirit *in all things*, then God reveals himself not towards man/woman exclusively, but towards his entire creation. Consequently, the Church cannot be confined to the human world, rather it must express God's care for the *whole* cosmos, and testify the hope for the redemption of all creation (cf. Rom 8:19). God's promise of salvation, seen from this perspective, is not directed to human beings alone, but to the creation community as a whole.

#### 4. CHRISTIAN VALUES VERSUS LIBERAL ATTITUDES

One of the main sources of injustice at the present time is the prevailing neo-liberal view of the world economy. We need to be aware of the difference between neo-liberal values and the Christian values expressed in the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching.

SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH	LIBERAL THEORY
The person as social, created in the image of God-Trinity.	The autonomous individual. Individual freedom is central.
Woman/Man involved in a complex network of relationships, centred in community.	Persons join together only because it serves their self-interest.
Interdependence because the person is SOCIAL.	The state of nature is a war "of every man against every man" where the only rights are to "self-preservation and independence."
	The individual and maximum profit are paramount. The primary rights are: life, liberty and property.
The development of human beings, social progress, order, security and peace depends on our interdependence.	No obligation towards other persons. e.g., no obligation to save a drowning person, except if I am a coast-guard.
Obligation to order society. Positive obligation towards the other. Moral obligation to save a life, no matter whose, even if the person has nothing to offer us.	Each association is seen on its own, ignoring the other forms of association through which persons relate to one another.
Persons interrelate in a variety of overlapping spheres of associational and institutional activity on behalf of the common good.	Owners of nature, they can dispose as they want.
Stewards of nature and of our own bodies.	The one who 'owns' the resource decides freely what to do with it to his/her own advantage.
We are called to work for a just use and sharing of resources by all.	Role of the state: to protect individuals in their "private" zones of activity. The primary zone of protection is economic activity.



<b>SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH</b>	<b>LIBERAL THEORY</b>
Private property is recognized, but with limits.	The right to private property gives a person the use of his/her “property” as he thinks fit, and if he pleases abuse it or destroy it.
The resources are to be at the service of the common good.	Autonomy of the individual.
Interrelationship means interdependence	Equality + non-solidarity= individualism
Equality + solidarity = harmony	Individual seems to exist only as a producer and consumer of goods or as an object of state administration.
Person’s flourishing depends on and contributes to the flourishing of others.	Rights are simply protections of the individual against interference from others.
Rights and Duties: human beings have the right to the minimum necessary and the duty to provide this minimum for each member of the human community. These Rights are the minimum conditions for life in community.	No positive action required on behalf t of others: NO economic and social rights.
Persons are interrelated; this means taking care of the economic and social rights (work, food, clothing, housing and health care). These Rights are the minimum conditions for life in community. This requires positive action on the part of others.	No obligation towards others. Only the economic rights and free market count. The market rules all other aspects of society.
Life’s aim to participate actively in building God’s Kingdom by caring for creatures and creation.	Life’s aim to make private profit and enjoy personal comfort.

### 4.2. Values and Traditions

In the Analysis above you looked at the contrasting values that different people consider important in their lives. Next, we consider the values of the tradition and culture where the community lives. We look at values that may be ‘dormant’ but that could help the community to decide how to deal with a particular situation.

Look at the sayings, proverbs that can inspire us and give light and hope to the situation. What are the most important traditions of the people regarding this situation?

## 5. FAITH REFLECTION AND CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

Your analysis of your chosen problem/situation in the light of your Faith, your particular Charism, Church Social Teaching and Tradition will have informed and refined your perception of the situation.

You will now have a better idea of what your Faith says about the situation and what action you need to take.

Write these thoughts and conclusions down.

Now look at these alongside the Conclusion of your Analysis (see previous section) and note down anything that strikes you.