

the power, beauty, and awesome dignity of the Creator. Social justice based on the teaching of Jesus acknowledges, and thereby worships and honors, the Creator of all. The whole body of Catholic social teaching ultimately points toward the great mystery of a God who, in the divine Being itself, is an immense dynamic communion of interpersonal love and equality among persons. Working for social justice thereby allows the followers of Jesus to be *instruments of that triune love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit overflowing into human interpersonal love and equality.*

For Catholics, social justice teaching is a profound insight into two realities: into the mystery of God and into the basic unity of the human race. Both of these speak of harmony, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Both are about relationship—relationship to God, to each other, and to the gifts of the earth. Both are shaped by the Word of God and graced with a message of hope for the future.

Social justice then sends the followers of Jesus on the road of a long pilgrimage to build the kingdom of God here on earth. To remain faithful to the insight and vision taught by Jesus in the Beatitudes, the followers of Jesus must repeatedly reconstitute themselves in his own Body and Blood and renew themselves in

the memory of his command to love God and neighbor. Thus, in the liturgy of the Eucharist or in the celebration of the Mass, by breaking bread and pouring wine, followers of Jesus rejoice in marvelous gifts of the earth shared by all; in the Eucharistic blessing, they believe that they themselves share in the Body and Blood of Christ, broken and poured out for all. In this radical openness, the followers of Jesus are made holy. They then bless all the elements *of the earth and all their brothers and sisters*, wherever they may be. In the celebration of the Eucharist, Christians extend themselves beyond their own secure worlds to the vastness and vulnerability of the human race. In 1981, Father Robert Hovda, in writing about the social experience of the Eucharist, expressed it this way:

Where else in society are all of us called to be social critics, called to extricate ourselves from the powers and principalities that claim rule over our daily lives in order to submit ourselves to the sole dominion of God before whom all of us are equal? . . . Where else are food and drink blessed in a common prayer of thanksgiving, broken and poured out, so that everybody, everybody shares and shares alike? (Henderson, Quinn, and Larson, 1989, 79)

Questions about the Text

1. How did the industrial revolution impact the concept of social justice?
2. What does the word “solidarity” mean in this document?
3. What does “preferential option for the poor” mean and imply?
4. What does the “theocentric option” mean and imply?
5. Why are the Beatitudes important?
6. What is the meaning of commutative, distributive, and legal justice?
7. List the eight principles for social justice offered by the U.S. Catholic bishops.
8. What does the sentence “Injustice, in fact, is a denial of God” mean in the conclusion?