

Fr. Perozich comments —

Deacon James Toner lays out his argument well. Social justice is important in sharing all the good in the world with the rest of humanity. To do that, however, the Christian first needs to be on his knees worshipping God.

- **Social justice, then, rightly practiced, demands first the cultivation of personal virtue (2 Pt 1:3-11), starting with being on our knees (Eph 3:14) to God.**

- ***first duty of Christ's Church, which is to save souls*** All Christians are called to the work of saving souls

- *“Beware of watering down Christianity until the solution is so weak that, if it were poison, it would not hurt anyone, and that, if it were medicine, it would not cure anyone.”*

- **The idea that we are called, first, to worship and prayer; the idea that we should try always to grow in holiness; the idea that piety (see CCC #1831) should be cultivated—these ideas are sometimes relegated to a very distant place in the secularized fever of political activism.**

- **‘if human society is to be healed, only a return to Christian life and institutions will heal it.**

- **[yet] the public ministry of the Church today is often described simply as the work of social justice**

- **Social justice is “the virtue that inclines one to co-operate with others in order to help make the institutions of society better serve the common good**

- **errors often creep into our thinking by the mistaken or malevolent magnification of only one part of a good idea.**

- **but never to confuse or to conflate spiritual salvation (1 Pt 1:9) with political programs. This remains a grave danger of social justice when it is perverted into ideological policies, even by well-meaning people (cf. Prv 9:6).**

- ***The Church must never be reduced to a political interest group or to a social agency or to a relief service. If and when advocacy for “social justice” is tantamount to impassioned, but specious, support for the modern, secular welfare state or for ultra-leftist politics, such advocacy is no longer Catholic but worldly***

- ***we are called to Christian witness against evil political power***

- ***In recent years, certain inflammatory issues—such as political collectivism, critical race theory, cybernetics and AI, environmental worries, gender fluidity, immigration, “LGBTQ” advocacy, “marriage equality,” and syncretism—have often been confused with the substance of Catholic social teaching, which, at its heart, teaches that “Anyone who is so ‘progressive’ as not to remain in the teaching of Christ does not have God”***

- ***To love one’s neighbor never means abandoning the Truth of the Faith which comes to us from the Apostles in order to accommodate or to appease the fashions, fads, and fantasies of the day, regardless of how “modern” and voguish such ideologies may appear.***

- ***Catholics do not—and must not—derive social justice principles from perfidious political ideology or crowd-pleasing rhetoric (cf. 2 Tm 4:2). Wrote Bishop Sheen: “Conscience cannot come to us from the rulings of society; otherwise it would never reprove us when society approves us, nor console us when society condemns”***

- ***This is the kind of fatuous thinking which can corrupt the virtue of social justice into vice.***

- ***Beware loving the wolf of totalitarian politics because it wears the sheep’s clothing of “social justice.”***

- ***“Without the knowledge Revelation gives of God we cannot recognize sin clearly and are tempted to explain it as . . . a developmental flaw, a psychological weakness, a mistake, or***

the necessary consequence of an inadequate social structure” (#387). Justice is the result of the observance of the moral law

- ***the government is not the ultimate dispenser of justice ... “Man is not for the State; the State is for Man.”***
- ***False mercy–mistaken “tenderness”–can excuse the most egregious sins. ...Monster governments always justify the storms of murder by promising the rainbows afterwards. Similarly, selfish, and twisted, logic permits grave evil in the name of good.***

Here ends my comments and some highlights taken from Deacon James Toner’s article below

On the Authentic Practice of Social Justice

 onepeterfive.com/on-the-authentic-practice-of-social-justice
Deacon James Toner March 3, 2021



- Pope Pius XI: “No genuine cure can be furnished for this lamentable ruin of souls, which, so long as it continues, will frustrate all efforts to regenerate society, unless men return openly and sincerely to the **teaching of the Gospel**” (*Quadragesimo Anno* [1931: #136]).
- “For there is no permanent city for us here on earth; we are looking for the city which is to come” (Hebrews 9:14).
- From a UN publication (*Social Justice in an Open World: The Role of the United Nations*): “Present-day believers in an absolute truth identified with virtue and justice are neither willing nor desirable companions for the defenders of social justice” (pp. 2-3). [So much for *Catholic Social Teaching*!]
- “Tenderness leads to the gas chamber” (Flannery O’Connor—case study below)

Scripture is replete with the call to justice (as in Psalm 15 or Micah 6:8 or in Matthew 25:31-46, containing Our Lord’s promise and warning about the Final Judgment and our Christian duty to take care of the least important in society). The Church teaches us about **many kinds of justice**: ***commutative***, referring to the justice of contracts between individuals, including wages and prices; ***distributive***, referring to fair allocation of benefits and burdens among people, including considerations of power and wealth; and ***legal***, referring to what the citizen owes in fairness to the community.

Catholics may know these ideas under the heading of “social justice,” for **the public ministry of the Church today is often described simply as the work of social justice**, which may be understood as the corporal works of mercy (see the

Catechism #2447) being practiced in society. Over the last fifty years, the Holy Fathers have taught us wisely and well about the critical importance of Catholics' being committed to social justice. In encyclicals from *Pacem in Terris* (John XXIII) to *Populorum Progressio* (Paul VI), to *Centesimus Annus* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (John Paul II) and *Caritas in Veritate* (Benedict XVI), we have heard the call to remember always what we learn in Sirach: "Give your help to the poor, and the Lord will give you his perfect blessing" (7:32 GNB).

The great English writer G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) once told us, however, that **errors often creep into our thinking by the mistaken or malevolent magnification of only one part of a good idea.** If we concentrate only, or even principally, upon social justice (which is, I repeat, a great good), we run the real risk of diminishing or possibly denying the enduring **first duty of Christ's Church, which is to save souls** (1 Pt 1:9; *Lumen Gentium* #14; *Gaudium et Spes* #45).[i] The Church must never be reduced to a political interest group or to a social agency or to a relief service. If and when advocacy for "social justice" is tantamount to impassioned, but specious, support for the modern, secular welfare state or for ultra-leftist politics, such advocacy is no longer Catholic but worldly (cf. James 1:27, 4:4).

Social justice is "the virtue that inclines one to cooperate with others in order to help make the institutions of society better serve the common good. While the obligation of social justice falls upon the individual, that person cannot fulfill the obligation alone, but must work in concert with others." –Father John Hardon, S.J.

We are always called to minister to the poor and to understand what is called the "universal destination of goods" (see *CCC* #2402-2403). We have a "horizontal" duty to our brothers and sisters. *We have, though, a primary "vertical duty"*

(the two arms of the holy cross) to keep Christ and the teachings of His Church always first in what we think and say and do.[ii] The first words of Our Lord, as reported in Mark's Gospel, are "Repent and believe in the Gospel" (1:15). **All Christians are called to the work of saving souls.** As our priest prays in the First Eucharistic Prayer (the Roman Canon): we ask the Lord to deliver us "from final damnation and [to be] counted among the flock of those you have chosen" (cf. Mt 10:28).

Similarly, **we are called to Christian witness against evil political power** (Is 1:17, 10:1; Ps 82:3, 103:6; Amos 5:24; Luke 1:52-53, 4:8; and see Pope Pius XI, *Mit Brennender Sorge* and *Divini Redemptoris* [both 1937]), **but never to confuse or to conflate spiritual salvation (1 Pt 1:9) with political programs.** This remains a grave *danger* of social justice when it is perverted into ideological policies, even by well-meaning people (cf. Prv 9:6).

In recent years, certain inflammatory issues—such as political collectivism, critical race theory, cybernetics and AI, environmental worries, gender fluidity, immigration, "LGBTQ" advocacy, "marriage equality," and syncretism—have often been confused with the substance of Catholic social teaching, which, at its heart, teaches that "Anyone who is so 'progressive' as not to remain in the teaching of Christ does not have God" (2 John 9, NAB). To love one's neighbor never means abandoning the Truth of the Faith which comes to us from the Apostles in order to accommodate or to appease the fashions, fads, and fantasies of the day, regardless of how "modern" and voguish such ideologies may appear. The Christian writer A. W. Tozer (1897-1963) helps us: "Beware of watering down Christianity until the solution is so weak that, if it were poison, it would not hurt anyone, and that, if it were medicine, it would not cure anyone."

Catholics do not—and must not—derive social justice principles from perfidious political ideology or crowd-pleasing rhetoric (cf. 2 Tm 4:2). Wrote Bishop Sheen: **“Conscience cannot come to us from the rulings of society; otherwise it would never reprove us when society approves us, nor console us when society condemns”** (cf. Ex 23:2). Everyone is welcome in the Catholic Church; but holy Mass begins with the Penitential Rite (see Rom 12:2; 1 Jn 2:15, Ps 51:10).

“At this moment, the Chinese are the ones who are best achieving the social doctrine of the Church.” So claimed Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. (Quoted by Ralph Martin, see under recommendations below [p. 153] and [at 1P5 here](#) [9 February 2018]). **This is the kind of fatuous thinking which can corrupt the virtue of social justice into vice.** After the Soviet revolution (about 1917-1924), journalist Lincoln Steffins (1866-1936) said, *“I have seen the future, and it works.”* (Both Bishop Sorondo and Steffins should then have quoted Proverbs 30:2.) **Beware loving the wolf of totalitarian politics because it wears the sheep’s clothing of “social justice.”**

As important as the corporal works of mercy are, one fears that **we hear too little today about the spiritual works of mercy,[iii] or about the traditional nine ways in which one can cooperate in sin** [[The 9 Ways We Participate in Others' Sins](#) 1 By counsel 2 By command 3 By consent 4 By provocation 5 By praise or flattery 6 By concealment 7 By partaking 8 By silence 9 By defense of the ill done] (see CCC #1868 and [this](#)), or about the necessity for conversion (as in 2 Chr 7:14, Joel 2:12-13, Tobit 13:6), or about our need (as we hear in every holy Mass) to acknowledge our sinfulness and to do penance, or about the spiritual warfare that rages around us (see Eph 6:12-13, CCC #409). In other words, the first element of

justice—in Latin *suum cuique*—is to render everyone his due, and, above all, to worship God in words and in works.

Of Eucharistic Adoration, for instance, Father Richard McBrien (1936-2015), formerly of the University of Notre Dame, said that it “is a doctrinal, theological, and spiritual step backward, not forward.” Asked by a reporter about abortion, political activist Sister Simone Campbell dismissively replied: “That’s above my pay grade.” Other nuns, though, practicing a life of contemplation, have been told “to get off your knees and do something!” **The idea that we are called, first, to worship and prayer; the idea that we should try always to grow in holiness; the idea that piety (see CCC #1831) should be cultivated—these ideas are sometimes relegated to a very distant place in the secularized fever of political activism.**

Beware the mistaken notion, therefore, that political, social, or economic programs can spiritually disinfect our sinful souls and concupiscent nature (see CCC #407, #1739, and #1853). “Without the knowledge Revelation gives of God we cannot recognize sin clearly and are tempted to explain it as . . . a developmental flaw, a psychological weakness, a mistake, or the necessary consequence of an inadequate social structure” (#387). Justice is the result of the observance of the moral law (#1740), and freedom, as Lord Acton once wrote, is not “the power of doing what we like, but the right of being able to do what we ought” (cf. #1741, #1733, #1707). **Social justice, therefore, always depends, first, upon the wise education of conscience (see Hosea 4:6; CCC #1783-1785).**

When Father Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio, S.J. (1793-1862), invented the term *social justice*, he was asserting the fact that we are social beings who live in community, but **the government is not the ultimate dispenser of justice** (see, especially, CCC #2244 and #2105). In other words, Taparelli used the term to

make the Catholic point, as a later writer (Jacques Maritain) was to say, that **“Man is not for the State; the State is for Man.”**

False mercy—mistaken “tenderness”—can excuse the most egregious sins. We feel sorry for the pregnant teenager; isn't an abortion warranted? We regret the plight of the very ill elderly man; isn't euthanasia justified? We pity the couple who want children; isn't in-vitro conception all right? **Monster governments always justify the storms of murder by promising the rainbows afterwards.** Similarly, selfish, and twisted, logic permits grave evil in the name of good. St. Paul admonished us about that; the end, however seemingly desirable, never permits sinful or flagitious means (Romans 3:8). As the writers Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy warned us, such tenderness “leads to the gas chamber.”

Pope Pius XI, who in 1931 made the term *social justice* a key term in our moral vocabulary, wrote that “to use the words of [a previous pope], **‘if human society is to be healed, only a return to Christian life and institutions will heal it.’** For this alone can provide effective remedy for that excessive care for passing things that is the origin of all vices; and this alone can draw away men's eyes, fascinated by and wholly fixed on the changing things of the world, and raise them toward Heaven. Who would deny that human society is in most urgent need of this cure now [in 1931 or 2021]?”

Social justice, then, rightly practiced, demands first the cultivation of personal virtue (2 Pt 1:3-11), starting with being on our knees (Eph 3:14) to God.

[i] “*With her social doctrine not only does the Church not stray from her mission but she is rigorously faithful to it*” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* [2004], #64. This is true, of course, provided that the temporal mission does not supplant the eternal mission of the Church. See the quotation below from *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

[ii] The horizontal arm must be attached to the vertical arm. This is not just good carpentry, but is also sound theology (cf. Rom 9:16, Gal 3:22).

[iii] “We must not ignore the fact that many, even generous Christians who are sensitive to the dramatic questions involved in the problem of liberation, in their wish to commit the Church to the liberation effort are frequently tempted to reduce her mission to the dimensions of a simply temporal project. *They would reduce her aims to a man-centered goal; the salvation of which she is the messenger would be reduced to material well-being. Her activity, forgetful of all spiritual and religious preoccupation, would become initiatives of the political or social order.* But if this were so, the Church would lose her fundamental meaning. Her message of liberation would no longer have any originality and would easily be open to monopolization and manipulation by ideological systems and political parties” (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* [1975], #32 [my emphasis]).



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