

Book Launch

MARCH 2013

Bishop Vincent Long launches Bruce Duncan's *Social justice: fuller life in a fairer world*

Bishop Vincent Long launched *Social Justice* by Fr Bruce Duncan on 1 March at the Cardinal Knox Centre in Melbourne. Bishop Long studied with Bruce at Yarra Theological College more than 20 years ago. Speaking to an audience of about 60 people, Bishop Long said:

“This book shows how concern for social justice is central to Christian faith, as the Scriptures insist. Jesus is the prophet of justice par excellence. As he declares in the Last Judgement scene in Matthew 25, God identifies with the sick, hungry, naked, the stranger. The parable of Lazarus and the rich man again emphasises that God takes very seriously our response to the poor.

Social Justice contrasts the great hopes and challenges facing our world, with shocking poverty in much of the world despite immense prosperity in other parts. Hopes for unprecedented global efforts to reduce hunger and the worst poverty through the Millennium Development Goals have been partly undermined by the Global Financial Crisis. Pope John Paul called for “a new creativity” to remove poverty and create conditions for worthy human living: “Intense prayer, yes, but not to distract us from our commitment to history”, rather, to help shape a new world.

Duncan considers especially the threat from climate change and global warming, warning of the dire consequences from even 2-3 degrees of warming.

The book highlights trailblazers in Catholic social thinking. Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador was assassinated because of his denunciation of a murderous regime. Canon Joseph Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers' Movement, had great influence in Australia. Though Cardijn only made a few short speeches at the Second Vatican Council, others were imbued with his ideas, and stressed the role of laity in the task of social transformation.



Bishop Vincent Long

The charismatic Brazilian Archbishop Helder Camara emerged as a champion of social justice in Latin America, helping to mobilise the Church against the military regimes and death squads, emphasising that faith demands social justice and respect for human rights. He carried these convictions into the Second Vatican Council. Camara also made a huge impact in his 1985 visit to Melbourne. Br Mark O'Connor continues to organise prominent social justice speakers in the Helder Camara lecture series.

Social Justice also portrays how outstanding lay men and women helped the Church incorporate the social dimensions of the Gospel at different periods.

Frederick Ozanam, a founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society, was a leading intellectual, journalist and activist

agitating for social reform. He laid foundations for modern Catholic social teaching.

Several women activists also made major contributions: Barbara Ward and Rosemary Goldie, and more directly in Australia, “Mum Shirl”, a “fearless and no-nonsense woman”, formidable in defence of Aboriginal people, but full of faith that this was what God expected of her.

Barbara Ward helped prepare the way for Vatican II’s documents, especially *The Church in the Modern World*. She also lobbied Pope Paul VI to set up the Pontifical Commission for Justice & Peace, of which she became a leading member. She worked constantly for the Church to engage energetically with the problems of poverty and world development.



Fr Bruce Duncan

Rosemary Goldie was an Australian member of the Ladies of the Grail, a society of apostolic women. An auditor at the Second Vatican Council, she helped shape debates about the role of laity in the Church’s mission.

These pioneers remind us that the Church’s social teaching does not drop mysteriously out of the sky, but is the result of long debates and often contestation.

The chapter critiquing capitalism traces papal teaching since Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* of 1891 and its surprising impact on Australia.

Social Justice also examines the Global Financial Crisis, particularly the ideology of

neoliberalism. Papal documents have long critiqued “economic liberalism” that insisted free markets automatically produce the best outcome, and hence dismissed social and distributive justice.

The book gives a brief snapshot of three other critical areas: the plight of Indigenous Australians; issues of war and peace; and the situation of refugees and asylum seekers.

Social Justice is beautifully illustrated and admirably suited for senior schools and social justice groups.”