

JPIC 91 – OCTOBER 2019

Health in the Lord and the Blessing of the Holy Spirit..[Rule of Saint Albert]
Saudavel iha Maromak no grasa Spirtu Santo Nian .. [Regula Sto Alberto]

"Making It Real"

A Commentary on the Australian Catholic Bishop's Social Justice Statement 2019-2020

I have a cartoon in my study depicting God sitting on a throne on a cloud looking ever so much like a childhood

caricature of God the Father. God turns to one of his attendants, an angel replete with wings and a halo and says, "Do you know I'm omnipotent?" The angel replies, "Apparently that's not enough anymore, nowadays you've got to have a Facebook page as well!" Seemingly it is not only God who has become a 'digital native' but as the Bishop's Social Justice Statement, "Making It Real" asserts, Pope Francis the successor of St Peter wants us all to become citizens of the digital world. For inspiration Francis uses the gospel image of the Good Samaritan reminding us that we are called not only to love our neighbor, but to bring the love of God to the new global neighbourhood. We are called to be inhabitants of this new digital world but more than that we are called to be active citizens shaping it. At the heart of this Bishop's Statement is positivity towards each of us shaping the digital world, of taking personal responsibility for its development and use. In this respect it mirrors precisely the gospel messages of respect, compassion, responsibility and truth.



I've wracked my brains to see if I can think of anyone among my acquaintances who is not in some way connected to social media even if the extent of

their interaction is simply to the sending and reception of emails. I found out about the death of a dear but distant friend via Facebook. Through



WeChat I was able to communicate with my grandson in China and almost daily my family exchange messages and photos through Facebook, Messenger and Instagram. I'm on Twitter but have neither the patience or time to engage beyond my present social media commitment, but that's a story for another time.

Though we are encouraged to take personal responsibility for our settings in using social media the Statement sharply reminds us that there are hidden governance and privacy issues that we need to address. As the global providers push back on any sort of regulation it's our responsibility to lobby government, business and international communication's forums to develop principled frameworks so that social media will flourish in an ethical environment.

The Catch-22 is that as the Statement acknowledges the digital landscape has the capability not only to reach, but to transform the lives of billions of users around the world as a technology heralded as a tool for democratization and the common good. It gives examples such as the Arab Spring and the #MeToo movement. On the other hand the Statement reminds us that Facebook's business model involves having people go to the site for social interaction, only to be quietly subjected to an enormous level of surveillance. The results of that surveillance are used to fuel a sophisticated and opaque system for

narrowly targeting advertisements...by profiling us and then selling our attention to advertisers, political actors and others.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) 'Digital Platform Enquiry' (as reported in the SMH & The Age, 16 Sept. '19) made twenty-three recommendations of which around half were largely supported by Facebook including greater oversight of business acquisitions by digital platforms, major changes to data privacy rules and changes to the way digital giants work with news organisations.

The ACCC Chair, Rod Sims last week lashed out at Facebook and Google for taking 'little responsibility' for their platforms and for facilitating the spread of fake news.



In a section of the Statement titled 'A Call to Action' there are important points to assist us in our daily social media interactions.

1. Make your online presence one of dignity and respect. Always remember that each person we communicate with on social media is a real person made in the image and likeness of God.
2. Be present to others in the real and virtual worlds. Make others feel that they have been truly heard and accepted.
3. Take care of yourself and others online. Be vigilant because sometimes abusive behavior online is so irrational and unrelenting it's best to disengage.
4. Every community should promote digital literacy. Knowing the pitfalls is to be forewarned. Recognising manipulation, distortion and bullying is digital literacy 101!
5. We cannot leave behind those of our sisters and brothers who lack online access. Hold governments accountable for making social media available to all.

6. The local community is a place to make the virtual real. There are heaps of things we can do. e.g. e-petitions, crowd-sourcing, raising issues of social injustice.
7. We must protect the personal data of citizens. Join the growing call for regulation of platform data gathering. Promote external audits and penalties for breaches of privacy.
8. We call for transparency and accountability in all online systems. Help to bring tech companies and governments together so that basic standards are not undermined by the drive for market domination and profit.
9. Truth and trustworthiness must be guaranteed. Try and identify and expose fake news. Support robust and independent journalism.

As Pope Francis has said.....

"I would like to encourage everyone to engage in constructive forms of communication that reject prejudice towards others and foster a culture of encounter, helping all of us to view the world around us with realism and trust" "If the Internet represents an extraordinary possibility of access to knowledge, it is also true that it has proven to be one of the areas most exposed to disinformation...we need to recognize how social networks help us to better connect, rediscover and assist one another, but on the other hand, lend themselves to the manipulation of personal data, aimed at obtaining political or economic advantages, without due respect for the person and his or her rights.



The Statement calls us to be Church by building genuine relationships based on truth, relationships that recognize the dignity of the other, made in the image and likeness of God. It encourages true encounters, those that make real the love of God in the life of our neighbor. It cautions us that technology allows us to work across cyber space without the need for face-to-face contact.

A Prayer from Pope Francis

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Help us to recognize the evil latent in a communication that does not build communion.

Help us to remove the venom from our judgements.

Help us to speak about others as our brothers and sisters.

You are faithful and trustworthy; may our words be seeds of goodness for the world:

Where there is shouting let us practice listening.

Where there is confusion let us inspire harmony.

Where there is ambiguity, let us bring clarity.

Where there is exclusion, let us offer solidarity.

Where there is sensationalism, let us use sobriety.

Where there is superficiality, let us raise real questions.

Where there is prejudice, let us awaken trust.

Where there is hostility, let us bring respect.

Where there is falsehood, let us bring truth.

Amen.



Edit: Peter Thomas, JPIC Team from 'Making It Real', Genuine Human Encounter in Our Digital World, Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference, Social Justice Statement 2019-2020. Copies of the Statement are available from Office for Social Justice, 02 83063499. Email: admin@acsjc.org.au or download direct from www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

FOR YOUR CALENDAR – OCTOBER

- 1 Oct – International Day for Older Persons
- 2 Oct - International Day of Non-Violence
World Habitat Day
- 4 Oct – St Francis of Assisi – Seasons of Creation
- 6 Oct – Synod on the Amazon commences**
- 10 Oct- world Mental Health Day
- 11 Oct- International Day of the Girl Child
- 13 Oct – Beginning of Anti-Poverty Week
- 15 Oct – International Day of Rural Women
- 16 Oct – World Food Day
- 17 Oct – International Day for the Eradication of
Poverty
- 24 Oct – United Nations Day –
1945 Establishment of the United Nations
- 26 Oct – 1985: Return of Uluru to the traditional
owners, the Anangu people



The Special Synod on the Amazon: A Call to the Universal Church to Consider New Pathways and an Integral Ecology ... which will take place from 6-27 October 2019 in Rome. The Pan Amazon Region contains the most diverse rainforest in the world and is home to 2,779,478 indigenous people, belonging to 390 groups-nationalities, with at least 137 isolated or uncontactable groups. There are 240 spoken languages belonging to 49 linguistic families.

The region is often referred to as the “lungs of the planet” as it is a significant absorber of carbon dioxide. Therefore, the Amazon Region contributes to the clean air we breathe and it contains 20% of the frozen water of the entire planet. For decades, this region has been exploited and used by global corporations, governments and international financial institutions. Today we are witnessing a level of deforestation of the Amazon as never before in our history from the excessive growth of agriculture, extractive industries, and logging activities.

“See, I am making all thing new.” Rev 21:5