

for creation,

3. Act:

Do we have enough information and analysis to act?

If not, what additional work is needed?

If we were to act to change this situation, what root causes would we tackle?

How do we go about changing the structures and relationships that produce this situation?

How do we plan to act in support of those who are disadvantaged?



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See, Judge, Act.

A reflection/action process for decision making

The social message of the Gospel must not be considered a theory but a basis for action....

Today, more than ever, the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more from the witness of actions than as a result of its logic and consistency.

**Pope John Paul II,
“The Hundredth Year” Encyclical Letter 1991**

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Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis, Minnesota USA
www.osjspm.org

INTRODUCTION

Moving from belief to action is a fundamental requirement of our faith (Matthew 25, 31-46. James 2, 14-17). Yet how do we do this? What steps are required?

This brief paper has a threefold purpose. First as a guide for decision-making about a current issue of injustice; second for thinking more deeply about everyday life experiences; and third for working with others in a small group. We hope you may use this guide as a tool to enrich your understanding of these experiences and to help identify available opportunities to act on behalf of justice.

BACKGROUND

The material in this booklet describes a reflection-action process. It is based on a methodology that is often described as the “see-judge-act” process. This process was initially promoted by a Belgian Catholic priest named Fr. Joseph Cardijn. Prior to World War II Fr Cardijn, made a Cardinal later in his life, inspired many Catholic social action groups such as the Young Christian Workers, Young Christian Students, and the Christian Family Movement.

This approach was also recommended in the 1961 encyclical letter by Pope John XXIII entitled, (The Church) *Mother and Teacher*:

There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: observe, judge, act.

Pope John XXIII, 1961, *Mother and Teacher*, n. 263

Political factors - Who decides? For whom do they decide?
How do decisions get made?
Who is left out of the decision-making process? Why?

Social factors - Who is included? Who is marginalised?
Why?

Historic factors - What past events influence the situation today?

Cultural factors - What values are evident?
What do people believe in?
Who or what influences what people believe and how they live?

B. Theological Reflection

What lessons or values from Scripture can help us to interpret this experience?

Eg. the Prophets, the Beatitudes, the  example of Jesus himself and the parables he told.

What key principles from the Church’s social teaching apply to this situation.

Eg. Human dignity, human rights and responsibilities, the common good, principle of subsidiarity, option for the poor, care

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See-Judge-Act process.

Reflection/Action Worksheet

1. See:

What do we know about this issue?

What did we observe?



What specific facts can we cite about this issue or experience?

What did we learn?

How do we feel in the face of this issue or experience?

Does it touch us personally?

2. Judge:

A. Social Analysis

From our experience, what is your understanding of the following:

Why does this situation exist?

What are the root causes?

Economic factors - Who owns? Who controls?

Who pays? Who profits? Why?



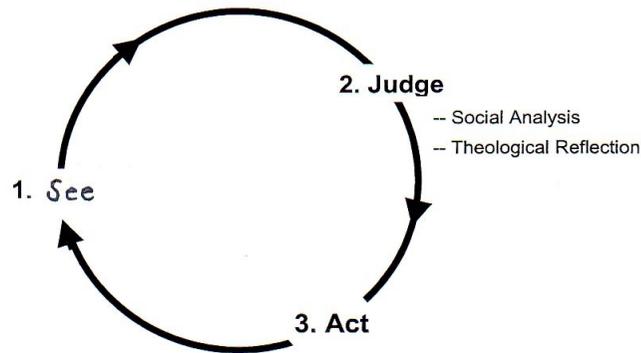
See, Judge, Act

Here is an outline of the key elements of the reflection-action process:

1. **What do we see?** See, hear and experience the lived reality of individuals and communities. Carefully examine the facts of the situation. What are the people in this situation doing? How are they feeling? What are they saying? What do we see is happening to them and how are they responding?
2. **What do we decide?** This is the heart of the process and it involves two key parts:
 - a. **Social Analysis:** Obtain a more complete picture of the social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships. In this step, we attempt to make sense of the reality that was observed in Step 1. Why are things this way? What are the root causes of the situation?
 - b. **Theological Reflection:** Analyse the experience in the light of Scripture and the Church's social teaching? Do biblical values and the principles of the Church's social teaching help us to see this reality in a different way? Does this experience correspond with the vision and teachings of Scripture and the Church's social thinking? If not, in what ways does it not match?

The word "judge" is used here in a positive sense: to analyse the situation using simple social and theological tools. It does not imply that we judge other people or that we are judgmental. Moreover, we do not need a theological or sociological education to participate in this process. They are practical techniques to understand the meaning of a situation and to respond effectively.

3. **What do we do?** Plan and carry out actions aimed at transforming the social structures that contribute to suffering



and injustice.

It is important to remember that this is a process. It is a cycle that is continually repeated. That is, after completing Step Three, the participants return to Step One, observing new realities, making new judgments, and finding new ways to act. This process is intended for groups working together, rather than for single individuals. The group process allows for a richer reflection, a deeper analysis, and a more creative search for effective action. Social analysis is a key element of “See, Judge, Act”. Since the concept may be new to some of us, it is worth exploring a little more.

Importance of Social Analysis

First, note that social analysis is an essential part of evangelisation as believers and disciples of Jesus Christ. Our faith leads us to work for a more just world, and social analysis is a necessary element of carrying out the work. In the words of Pope Paul VI,

*It is up to the Christian communities to analyse with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel’s unalterable words and to draw **principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action** from the social teaching of the Church.*

Pope Paul VI, 1971, *A Call to Action*, n. 4

Similarly, Pope John Paul II has urged us to go beyond the symptoms and effects of injustice and seek out the root causes:

We should not limit ourselves to deploring the negative effects of the present situation of crisis and injustice. What we are really required to do is destroy the roots that cause these effects.

Pope John Paul II, World Day of Peace Message, 1995

Benefits of Social Analysis

- ◆ It leads us beyond the interpersonal level and to think systemically. Systems are interrelated parts that form a whole, and social and economic systems act and react with other systems to produce the social conditions in which we live. By using social analysis, we begin to see the connections between social institutions and we begin to get a fuller picture of the social, economic, and political forces at work in our world.
- ◆ It enables us to make a more objective diagnosis of the social problem. In doing so we avoid spending time and energy on activities that will not really change the situation. In this way, social analysis is a tool that leads to effective action.
- ◆ It helps us identify potential allies and opponents in the search for a just resolution of the situation.

