

## Why are our Australian institutions so silent regarding the Gaza genocide?

*A reality of our day: The Israeli government with the full support of the United States is conducting genocide in Gaza. Numerous other countries, including Australia, as well as a multitude of corporations worldwide are complicit.*

*Question: Why are Australian institutions so silent, so quiet, in the face of obvious and evident mass slaughter, another holocaust? It seems that the values of institutions such as churches, universities, think-tanks, media, parliaments and governments go little further than self-interest and individual gain? Public debate, civic discourse, critical thinking and expression are submerged in a sea of apathy, inertia, and an 'it-doesn't-affect-my-lifestyle or bottom-line' attitude.*

I will focus here on the Catholic Church because it is the institution I know best but the following comments have relevance for others as well.

Christianity as a faith and the church as an organisation have contributed enormously to the advancement of humanity. There have been dark and scandalous times but I am convinced that the potential for future progress is deep and positive. To make that future a reality, the church (all of us) must respond with courage and strength to the events of our times.

However, our present leaders seem unable to accept their humanitarian and Christian responsibilities and grasp the opportunities for making a difference in current circumstances. Australia is in dire need of strong ethical and moral leadership. Bishops could do much to fill this void – if they would.

The core purpose of the church is to spread the message of Jesus on how to live full and meaningful lives and to support people as they seek to do so. In Gospel terms, this is loving God (the glory of God is humanity fully alive) and loving your neighbour.

Standing idly by while we see the bones of Gaza's children outlined under wasted skin is not an act of love. Our church could be the voice that expresses the pain and anguish felt deeply across the country. Bishops would be speaking for humanity, not just Catholics – as is their responsibility.

Holocaust commemorations have been held for eighty years. 'Never again' was the mantra but another holocaust is happening now, not hidden in secret concentration camps, but visible, in plain sight, on our TV screens every day. We watch in silence. Our church could change that with strong calls directed to mobilising public opinion, encouraging critical thinking, demanding that parliamentarians live up to their responsibilities to protect life wherever it is threatened.

The church is rightly proud of its social teaching. However, it suffers from low credibility and public traction which are essential for effectiveness. The church could promote and lead public discussion and debate on critical issues that concern all Australians, including Gaza. The potential for a strong positive influence on the quality of civic discourse is a well-kept secret. It must be noted here that the church's nonsensical, counter-productive and sinful position on the status of women pre-empts and undermines any attempt at taking its social teaching seriously.

Taking a strong stand on issues such as the crucifixion of Gaza and working through the rationale for its position with transparency could lead to a desire for critical thinking and integrity in this and other aspects of church life. The church's public profile will change only when it is seen to walk the walk.

Collaborating with other denominations, religions and all fair-minded Australians would be a significant contribution to the Australia we long for.

The *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* revealed enormous deficiencies including the devastation caused by not speaking out when truth was required. Have we learned anything? Here is a truth that calls on the 'very stones to cry out.' The silence is deafening!

Why have Catholics become so supine? Is it because we have become so accustomed to authoritarian clergy and hierarchy that we have become authoritarian followers who, as John Dick said recently, go through life with impaired thinking, sloppy reasoning and prejudiced beliefs?

Popes Francis and Leo have made their positions clear but they seem to have been left like a shag on a rock without support from local churches as if the rest of us do not care.

We are all complicit through the intersections of government policies and international agreements, diplomatic niceties and business collaborations. Major IT companies are involved. We can acknowledge the complicity forced on us by circumstances without letting it silence us. As intelligent humans, we are ethically bound to speak up. Christians claim to live by a higher moral standard.

If I seem to overemphasise the responsibilities of bishops, I suggest a reading of the Final Document of the recent Synod on Synodality. Differentiated co-responsibility features prominently there. It means that ordinary Catholics can contribute to assembling the material for decisions (decision-making) but the decision itself (decision-taking) is in the hands of the 'competent authority' – usually the local bishop. Bishops must accept the responsibility that flows from the differentiation for speaking for the church – or not speaking.

The Final Document also insists that decision-takers must have due regard for the views of decision-makers. If any bishop does not know what Catholics think about the genocide, he is not listening.

The bishops' statement on 2 June 2025 (*Bishops' social justice commission calls for peace*) was weak. They call for peace without naming the genocide or the perpetrators – Israel and USA. The penultimate paragraph reads: "But before anything else, we should – as our 2024 Social Justice Statement encouraged – invite God to nurture peace in our hearts and discern how we can share that peace with our troubled world". We have voices, a message and a very large institution; let us be heard!

In the great Gospel parable of *The Last Judgement*, Matthew has Jesus refer to hungry, thirsty, marginal, naked, sick and imprisoned people. The good are rewarded for what they actually do, not for 'nurturing peace in their hearts' or 'discerning.'

The Catholic church is by no means the only Australian institution currently showing an absence of backbone and an emptying out of human values. Our nation, in its parts and as a whole, needs to stand up and be counted.

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