

Why I Am Catholic

We speak out against sins involving groups, corporations, nations, and others who do not consider the impact of their actions on everyone else. Most churches speak loudly about individual sins but rarely about sins of a society or a large group. They give the impression that, for them, individual sins are the greatest sins. All sins are serious and when a group of individuals commit the same sin together, we must speak out and stop it.

"Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the divine goodness. 'Structures of sin' are the expression and effect of personal sins. . . In an analogous sense, they constitute a 'social sin.'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1869)

An example would be an oppressive government or a government policy that has a negative effect or is for the benefit of a few at the expense of others. Corporations can fall into "social sin" if they are focused only on profit and don't care about their workers or any harm their goods or services cause. Hospitals commit "social sins" when they allow abortions or provide other medical services that are contrary to the Gospel. Agencies, organizations, other groups, even churches can fall into "social sin" if they are not vigilant or become misguided.

We must be careful in supporting causes that there are not some ulterior motives or moral complications. The Church at times cautions us about certain activities or certain groups.

We can become involved in a "social sin." "We have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when *we cooperate in them*: 1) by participating directly and voluntarily in them; 2) by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them; 3) by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so; 4) by protecting evil-doers." (1868)

Examples are remaining silent about a crime or act of injustice, participating in an illegal or immoral activity with others, or glorifying and celebrating bad behavior. If I join a gang, or buy alcohol for teenagers, or allow someone to be bullied at school, I am committing an individual sin that is also a "social sin."

Some "social sins" involve many people doing different things. Each one commits a sin and participates in the group sin. The more directly involved I may be, the greater God and society hold me accountable. If I rob the bank, or drive the getaway car, or am a lookout, or am the inside person who cooperates, or am the mastermind, I am still involved, part of something sinful, and am culpable.

Even if there are circumstances of force and fear—or I didn't know exactly what was going on—I still have participated in something morally wrong and could have said no. When Adolph Hitler tried to find all the Jews in Germany, some Germans turned in their neighbors; others protected their neighbors at great personal risk. In the end, we must live our faith; educate ourselves about causes, groups, and situations, before becoming involved; and speak out when there is sin and injustice.