



Catholic Archdiocese of Perth

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The Catholic Story of Justice

Introduction - A word about 'Catholic'.

The word 'catholic' comes from two Greek words - KATA HOLON - meaning 'according to the whole'. Catholic therefore means 'universal', 'embracing all reality' 'inclusive'. The Catholic approach claims to think and speak not just about a part of reality but about the whole of reality. Catholic ways of thinking and acting are dialogues and encounters with the whole of reality, namely, God, human beings and all creation.

Thus the Catholic way is an inclusive rather than an exclusive journey. It is 'both...and' thinking rather than, 'either...or'. It is:

Both faith **and** reason

Both scripture **and** tradition

Both grace **and** good works

Both soul **and** body

Both Christ **and** the Reign of God

Both the Reign of God **and** the Church

Both prayer **and** the poor

Both capital **and** labour

Both border protection **and** the rights of asylum seekers

Both symbol **and** action

Both God **and** the world

Being a Catholic is not so much something we are, as something we are always aspiring to be. Simone Weil said, 'How can we call ourselves Catholic and leave out the universe?'

The foundations of Catholic Social Thinking

Christian Social Teaching is an essential part of our 'response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us' (first Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI *God is Love, 1*). The Catholic Church strongly affirms the life of every human being. The Bible teaches us that human life shares in the life of God and that God shares in every human life.

The communal and social nature of the human being is a reflection of the communal and social nature of the Holy Trinity. Jesus Christ, our Lord, has revealed God as Father and sends us the Holy Spirit to love us and to help form us in our peaceful and just dealings with others.

This justice tradition is deeply rooted in the Old and the New Testament. It is generally agreed that papal social documents form an accepted core literature of the subject of Catholic Social Thought. It is sometimes referred to as the *Social Magisterium* of the Church. From these sources we can arrive at some basic principles of Catholic social teaching.

Basic Principles of Christian Social Teaching

The life and dignity of the human person

Every person is made in the image of God (Genesis 1, 26). The test for every institution or policy is whether it enhances or threatens human life and dignity. People are more important than any 'thing'.

The rights and responsibilities of the human person

Every person has the right to life and to raise a family. No relationship is more central to human life than the family. Other rights include sufficient life goods, the availability of education and work, economic justice, cultural expression and the right to freedom of conscience. These rights carry corresponding responsibilities – to others, our families, the local community and to the larger society. These responsibilities lead to the principle of the *Common Good*.

The common good

Vatican II described the common good as the sum of those social conditions which allow groups *or individuals* ready access to their own fulfilment (*Vatican 2. Church in the Modern World, 26*). In our globalised world the Catholic Church now argues strongly for international structures that promote the peaceful and just development of all peoples across human regional and national boundaries.

The dignity of work and the rights of workers

Work is a realisation of our human value and identity. To work is to join forces with the Creator in fashioning a just and peaceful world. Working people should participate in the workplace in a manner consistent with their dignity and rights. Such rights include, productive work, fair wages, freedom of association and occupational, health and safety protection. The economy was made for people not people for the economy.

The option for the poor and vulnerable

The poor and vulnerable must have a full participatory place in all our communities. This is a basic moral test of any society. An option for the poor is not an exclusive choice, but it reflects our call as Christians to respond to and include our sisters and brothers in greatest need. An option for the poor is an option for the common good.

Subsidiarity

This could be called the principle of initiative. Individuals have a right to personal initiative and communities and groups have the right and the responsibility to be involved in initiatives and decisions, policies and programs that bear on their lives.

Care for God's creation

The New Testament teaches that Christ brings healing to the whole of creation (Col 1, 15-17). In January 2001 Pope John Paul II called for an '*ecological conversion*' among Christian people (World Day of Peace Message 2001). As Christians we are called to celebrate the community of life, to strive for sustainable development and to protect the environment for future generations.

The Biblical Bases of Catholic Social Thought

The Hebrew Testament (Old Testament)

What we understand of the Hebrew Scriptures must be somehow connected with the realities of the church today.

Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*

The Hebrew Testament contains much social thinking. Picture the kinds of people the Hebrew tribes were before their scriptures were written down. What were the people like behind those wonderful stories from the book of Genesis?

They were a loose collection of nomadic family clans. They lived their lives entirely as a close-knit part of the family. Apart from the clan, tribe or family the individual would perish. All the resources of the tribe were common resources. There was no such thing as private property or personal wealth. All their norms, rules and customs protected and promoted the safety of kinfolk and family. Solidarity was a value crucial to survival. Within the clan there were very few economic gaps or notions of class.

Genesis Ch. 50 and Exodus Ch. 1 relate a fascinating story. The patriarch Joseph forgives his brothers and they all moved to Egypt. But they move there with the tribal memory of a solemn promise: 'Then Joseph said to his brothers *'I am about to die, but God will surely come to you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob'* (Gen 50, 24). In Egypt, however, they became an oppressed people: *'The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites and made their lives bitter with hard service'* (Ex 1, 11-14).

After a long, painful time, something new happened. Moses became the leader of the Israelites and he did two fundamental things: he resolved to dismantle the oppressive behaviour of the Egyptians and he set out to free the Israelites and form a new community inspired by the worship of Yahweh and the politics of justice and compassion (see *The Prophetic Imagination*).

I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their appeal to be free... Yes I am well aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians... (Exodus 3, 7).

And so about 1200 BCE, after 40 years of desert wanderings, the Hebrew clans crossed the Jordan River and overran the land of Canaan. They settled there and became farmers or graziers tied to their land. At the beginning these Hebrew clans occupied the less fertile hilly country. Gradually, however, their economic life moved from the countryside to the towns. They were no longer nomads.

These Hebrew clans federated and became known as the twelve tribes of Israel. The story of Jacob's children in Genesis 20, 31- 30, 24 speaks of 10 tribal leaders: Ruben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Gad, Dan, Joseph and Benjamin. The Joseph clan expands into two more, namely, Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen 38, 18-20). After the occupation of Canaan, Joshua became the leader of the confederation and allocated land to the clans (Joshua 18, 1-10).

This Hebrew confederation grew into the Israelite nation centred on the memory of Yahweh's rescue of the people in Egypt. However, slowly the people came under the influence of other Canaanite and Philistine people and their values. Some Israelites came to worship the Canaanite god, Baal. Moreover, social conditions among the Israelites were changing. We now see people in poverty. Scholars indicate that around 1000 BCE living standards in Israel were still more or less equal but great differences were evident two centuries later. Yet the old norms, rules and customs, and especially the influence of Moses and Yahweh, their God – who is on the side of the poor – remained central to Hebrew religion and society.

The first five books of the Bible are called the *Torah*, meaning *Law*. Another name is the *Pentateuch* (*penta means five; teuchos means scroll*)

The TORAH contains three separate codes or sets of laws for the people:

The Code of the Covenant (e.g. Exodus 22, 20 – 23, 33)

The Code of the Covenant is proclaimed by Moses, God's mediator and lawgiver, at the foundation of Israel. It is not comprehensive but it offers a glimpse into the mind of Yahweh. It includes:

- Measures to protect aliens, widows and orphans
- A condemnation of lending at high rates of interest
- Censures on giving false testimonies
- Give basic necessities and rights to those in need
- The outlawing of a bribe: *It twists the words even of the just* (Ex 23, 8)

The Deuteronomic Code (Deuteronomy Ch. 12, 1 – 26, 15).

The importance of the Book of Deuteronomy cannot be overstated. It has influenced a great proportion of the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures, including the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Even the prophetic writings of Hosea and Jeremiah show the influence of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is presented as Moses' last testament to Israel before he died. Just as the Gospel of John, Chapters 14 – 17, are presented as the final testimony of Jesus before he died.

The Code of Deuteronomy says:

The presence of the poor is never to be considered an unavoidable fact of life

There shall be no poor among you (Deut 15, 4).

That the presence of the poor is a contradiction of God's vision for the human community.

Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land' (Deut 15, 11).

Justice and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you (Deut 16, 20).

That the notion of the sabbatical is to be practiced

In the seventh year, the year of remission, is near (Deut 15, 9).

Every seventh year you shall grant a remission of debts (Deut 15, 1 – 11).

For the writers of Deuteronomy, seeing God was never the issue. What posed a danger for the people was not hearing God

*Has any person ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and live?
From heaven God made you hear his voice to discipline you*

(Deut 4, 33ff).

The Code of Holiness (Leviticus Ch 17 – Ch 26).

This code is the work of priests (of the tribe of Levi) written after the end of the Babylonian Captivity (586-538 BCE).

Provides norms and directives for religious observance and practice

A handbook on the Israelite Liturgy

Directives for acts of justice (holiness) in everyday life

You shall not – defraud your neighbour, - keep for yourself the wages of a labourer until morning – revile the deaf, put a stumbling block before the blind, - render an unjust judgement ... but you shall love your neighbour as yourself (Lev 19, 11-18).

Three divine qualities emerge from these codes, namely, God as rescuer, God as revealer and God as indweller.

I love you, Lord, my strength, my rock, my deliverer, my shield, my saving horn, my stronghold (PS 18, 1); The Lord is close to the broken-hearted, saves those whose spirit is crushed ... no one is condemned whose refuge is God (Ps 34, 19 – 23)

The Hebrew Prophets

The Hebrew prophets spoke out fearlessly about the moral vision of Yahweh as contained in the great codes of the covenant. Their aim was simple and unique. They emphasised:

The call to holiness and justice in the 'new community' of Yahweh

The concern for people in poverty

The focus on widows, orphans and foreigners

The forceful denunciation of all forms of

Oppression, fraud and monopoly of the land

Injustice from rulers and judges

'High living' of the rich in the face of the poor

e.g. Amos 3: 10; 4: 1-3; 5: 7, 10 – 15; 6: 4-7; 8: 4-7.

Isaiah 1: 23; 3: 12-15; Second Isaiah: 41:17; 42: 22-23; Third Isaiah 58: 3-10; 61: 1-3. Micah 2: 1-3; 3: 1-4; 3:9-12; 6:9-13. Jeremiah 5: 27-28; 7: 5-11; 22: 13-19; Ezechiel 34: 1-10; 45: 9-12.

What the Hebrew prophets did in their day was to:

Emphasise alternative values and ways of living

Maintain a larger view of reality than the institutions of their day

Challenge those structures which repress or deny divine-human creativity

Denounce all false idols (institutions tend to turn into idols)

Offer new possibilities under God

Push accepted boundaries into new ways of thinking and serving

Always point to God who can never be confined, formalized or limited to any institution

Lead the people to be both 'people of God' and 'people of Humanity' (notice 'both...and')

'The doctrine of both the apostles and the prophets is necessary for salvation'

St Thomas Aquinas OP

'Acts of justice are acts of prayer'

Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP

The New Testament

'The Reign of Christ is a reign of fairness and justice.'

'The life of Christ is the model and form of our justice.'

'Christ is justice itself.'

Three quotes from St Thomas Aquinas

The Gospel has justice at its heart

Mary's Magnificat: Luke 1: 46-51

Mary's Magnificat is a prophetic message. 'Mary is one of the great female prophets' (Thomas Aquinas). The Magnificat is a prayer of joy and thanks to God, prayed with deep humility. The humble young woman, Mary, stands in the tradition of the *poor of Yahweh*. Here are some Old Testament texts which lie in the background of Luke's narrative: Zephaniah 3. 11 – 20; the four servant songs of Isaiah – Is 42, 1 – 9; 49, 1 – 7; 50, 4 – 11; 53, 1 – 12; 1 Samuel 2, 1 – 12; Habakkuk 3, 18; Psalm 103, 17. Mary is the true *daughter of Zion* and *daughter of Jerusalem* (Zeph. 3, 14).

In the Magnificat, Mary stands as the embodiment of Israel made pregnant with the Word of God – the God of the poor.

Jesus' Mission Statement: Luke 4: 16-21.

It is no accident that this incident took place in the synagogue. The first century synagogue service consisted of the singing of a psalm, the recitation of the *Hear O Israel (Shema Israel)*, Deuteronomy 6, 4 – 5), and readings from the *Torah and the Prophets*. Here is the link with the new community of Moses, centred on the saving power of Yahweh and a compassionate and just way of living, and on the prophets' repeated call to holiness and justice. And Jesus is saviour, revealer and indweller – just as Yahweh is. Jesus' words here are expressed in terms of Isaiah (Is. 61, 1 and 58, 6). Jesus' mission is in direct line with the Jubilee (Leviticus 25, 2 – 7), founded on the concepts of justice and equality.

Jesus' Beatitudes: Luke 6: 20-2; Matthew 5, 1 – 12.

Notice that the Beatitudes are addressed only to certain people – in Luke to certain categories of people, *you who are poor... hungry... you who weep now;*

in Matthew they are addressed to people with certain life attitudes, *the poor in spirit... those who mourn... the meek... those who hunger and thirst for justice... the peacemakers*. God offers his Kingdom to these people, and Jesus devotes himself to these people. Jesus invites these people to follow the way he is showing them.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2007 book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, said that in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew portrays Jesus as the new and greater Moses and that the sermon itself, which includes the Beatitudes, was the new Torah brought by Jesus. Jesus does not replace the Ten Commandments, rather he reinforces them and goes further, *Blessed are the poor in spirit* (Matt. 5, 3 ff). During and after the Babylonian Exile (586 – 515 BCE) Israel had to learn the hard lesson that poverty and oppression had the effect of bringing it closer to God. The poor do not stride into God's presence; they stand in reverence. The poor

deal justly with others because God is just. Jesus is in this Old Testament tradition of the *poor of Yahweh*.

Matthew 25, 31-46 is a scene of the *Last Judgement*. It is about seeing and welcoming the body of Christ in the bodies of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. This text implies that it is these people who stand in the place of Christ – these people are the true vicars of Christ. Pope John Paul II called this passage a,

page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ. By these words no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine, the Church measures her fidelity as the Bride of Christ (Beginning of the New Millennium n. 49).

1 Corinthians 11, 17-34 is Paul speaking about early Eucharistic gatherings. No one can participate in the Eucharist and leave out the poor. We must '*recognise the body*' (1 Cor 11, 29), we must have *respect for the community of God and not to make poor people embarrassed* (1 Cor 11, 22). Pope Benedict said in his first encyclical *God is Love, A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented* (God is Love)

The Letter of James

By the time James was writing (50-60? CE), social differences had arisen among the small Christian communities. The rich seemed to be expecting deferential treatment. Maybe there were some cases of exploitation in these communities (James 5: 4-6). The Letter of James is relevant to our communities today. (James 1: 9-11; 1: 27; 2: 1-9; 5: 1-6)

Some more thoughts of Thomas Aquinas:

'Jesus did not say simply. '*Do justice*', but do justice with an insatiable desire. Christ used the phrase, '*hunger and thirst after justice*'.

There are those things we do because we are duty bound, like paying GST and PAYE taxes. Jesus goes beyond this. There are those things we do out of our own generosity, beyond duty, more than a strict sense of obligation: '*blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice*'.

The theology of the New Testament is in a process that is coming to be; it is a period of discovery that has not come to an end.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar *The Glory of the Lord Vol 7* p. 110.

The history of the Church abounds with examples of care and justice for the poor from the earliest days to the present. Some very few examples are St Lawrence, Saint Martin of Tours, St Francis of Assisi and St Clair, St Vincent de Paul, St Don Bosco, Blessed Mary MacKillop, Mother Teresa.