The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching

Its Origins and Contemporary Significance

David Matzko McCarthy

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Contents

Introduction 9

Part One: Sources

1. Biblical Justice 19
   Mary Katherine Birge, SSJ
   Discussion: Justice, Mercy, and the Good Samaritan
2. The Liturgy as a Source of Formation in Catholic Social Teaching 31
   Rev. James M. Donohue, CR
   Discussion: “Be not afraid; I am with you always”
3. Eucharist and Social Justice 45
   Rodica Stoicoiu
   Discussion: A Reflection on Eating
4. Pope Leo XIII and a Century of Catholic Social Teaching 55
   John F. Donovan
   Discussion: Private Property and Common Work

Part Two: Love

5. Saint Augustine of Hippo—Love, Community, and Politics 73
   William Collinge
   Discussion: *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*
6. A Contemporary Augustinian Approach to Love and Politics—Pope Benedict XVI’s *Deus Caritas Est* 85
   William Collinge
   Discussion: *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*
7. Modern Politics and Catholic Social Teaching 95
   David Cloutier
   Discussion: Politics and Health

David Matzko McCarthy,
The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching: Its Origins and Contemporary Significance,
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Part Three: Justice

8. Natural Law—St. Thomas Aquinas and the Role of Reason in Social Order 113
   Joshua P. Hochschild
   Discussion: Subsidiarity, Labor Associations, and Family
9. Modern Economy and the Social Order 129
   David M. McCarthy
   Discussion: Fair Trade in an Economy of Anonymity
10. Through the Needle's Eye—The Catholic Worker Movement and the Challenge of Voluntary Poverty 141
   Kathy Dow Magnus
   Discussion: Household Hospitality

Part Four: Moving Forward

11. The Challenge of Religious Liberty 157
   Richard Buck
   Discussion: Violence and Truth
12. Compassion and Hospitality 169
   Trudy Conway
   Discussion: Hospitality in Action
13. From Despot to Steward—The Greening of Catholic Social Teaching 183
   Brian G. Henning
   Discussion: Common Cause or Someone Else's Problem

Notes 195
Index 211

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Introduction

The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching emerges from an ongoing collaboration of teaching philosophy and theology. It represents more than a few years of conversation and argument about how to integrate social ethics and concerns about the common good into our courses and our own lives. In the chapters that follow, the reader will see the effects of our discussions. The contributors represent not a random collection of academics, but philosophers and theologians who talk with each other weekly, if not daily, read one another's work, attend each other's lectures, and frequently brainstorm about how best to engage students in our conversations about love and justice. We certainly do not always agree, but we are committed to common efforts to enhance the mission of our institution, Mount St. Mary's University. It is a lively and unusual place. We are happy for the opportunity to use this book in addressing our own students and, for some of us, addressing the members of our parishes. Hopefully, the book will invigorate conversations where we live and work. But we are especially pleased to reach a wider audience.

Our sense of audience draws on two important concepts in Catholic social teaching: solidarity and subsidiarity. These terms will be developed in the book, especially in chapters 7 and 8. Generally speaking, solidarity points to the interdependence and mutual responsibilities of people, locally and across the globe. Subsidiarity highlights the function of local institutions, communities, cooperatives, and networks of people who join together in common endeavors for the common good. We think about *The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching* as an exercise in thought that ought to inspire solidarity and encourage investment in subsidiary networks and groups. Some of the chapters offer specific suggestions and challenges to the reader, challenges which the authors take very seriously. We are taking up these challenges as regular habits of life—starting fair-trade networks in our parishes, making time and

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space for practices of hospitality, and changing our patterns of consumption and waste. If you extend the inquiry of the book through conversations with others, and if you make efforts to promote the common good through subsidiary networks, you will be connected to us, and reading the book, like our writing of it, will be a practice of solidarity.

The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching is mainly about modern Catholic social teaching. Books on Catholic social thought usually begin with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on the condition of labor, issued in 1891. In this volume, however, we will begin with basic sources of the Christian life: scripture, worship, and membership in the church (chaps. 1–3). After these topics, we will introduce (in chapter 4) Leo XIII's encyclical, "On the Condition of Labor." The encyclical also goes by the Latin title, *Rerum Novarum* or "new things" (which are the first two words of the Latin translation of the document). An "encyclical" letter, from the Greek word for "circle," is a major teaching document of a pope that is addressed and circulated to the whole church. In *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII deals with "revolutionary changes" of the modern era: the industrial revolution, the plight of the wage-earning poor, the *laissez faire* or hands-off approach of governments with capitalist economies, and the challenges of socialism.

From this beginning, a series of documents follow, some of which are encyclicals issued on the anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. Pope Pius XI, for example, disseminates *Quadragesimo Anno* ("forty years") in 1931, and John Paul II issues *Centesimus Annus* ("one hundred years") in 1991. The body of Catholic social teaching also includes documents of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) which met between 1962 and 1965. The Council gives us a number of (conciliar) documents, and the one most often cited in relationship to social teaching is the "Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World"—*Gaudium et Spes* ("the joys and hopes"). Also included is "Justice in the World," a document written by the Synod of Bishops that was assembled by Pope Paul VI in 1971. In short, modern Catholic social teaching is based on a set of documents initiated by Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*. The documents are available on various websites (www.vatican.va) and in published collections.[1]

Our book is divided into four parts. Within each part, the chapters will be followed by issues or texts for discussion: biblical texts, key documents in Catholic social teaching, issues like health-care reform, and proposals about how we might live differently. As noted above, the first part provides a discussion of sources—the Bible, liturgy, and the church, along with a chapter on Pope Leo XIII's teaching on the "revolutionary changes" in the modern world. Parts 2 and 3, titled "Love" and "Justice," are also organized by sources important to the modern social tradition. Both parts will indicate that love and justice, in Catholic thought, cannot be treated as entirely independent goods or spheres. You will see discussions of justice in part 2 on love, and a

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good bit of love in part 3 on justice. In theological terms, God's grace and righteousness are one. Nonetheless, the division between love and justice allows us to trace Augustinian themes in modern thought (on love in part 2) and the importance of Thomas Aquinas (on justice in part 3). Part 4 (with three chapters) treats topics that have become contentious in recent years: religion in public life, moral pluralism, and environmental stewardship (particularly the problem of global climate change). This last part of the book is a "sending forth" of sorts. The final chapters present hospitality as the way for Christians to engage others in a world of disagreements and indifference on matters of justice and the pursuit of truth.

Outline: Part One—Sources

Part 1 discusses the primary sources in the Christian tradition: scripture and worship. It also treats what is marked as the beginning of modern Catholic social teaching, Pope Leo XIII's "On the Condition of Labor" (1891). Each chapter of part 1, and the entire book, is followed by a discussion section and usually by proposals about what we can do in response to the ideas presented in the chapter. In other words, the themes of Catholic social thought are set in terms of everyday life.

In chapter 1, "Biblical Justice," Sr. Mary Kate Birge develops an understanding of justice in terms of our relationship to God. She reviews the Old and New Testaments, from Genesis to Jesus. She shows that biblical justice is not like the blindfolded Lady Justice depicted in courthouses across the country. God's justice is not anonymous and disinterested, but personal and full of compassion. From the Exodus to the ministry of Jesus, we know that God lifts up the lowly; Jesus gathers the outcast and announces the reign of God. In response to this chapter, we introduce a discussion on how we are called to read scripture in community, and Sr. Mary Kate guides us through a reflection on the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37.

Chapter 2 is titled, "The Liturgy as a Source of Formation in Catholic Social Teaching." In this chapter, Fr. James Donohue explains the formative nature of worship, particularly through sacraments of initiation, baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist. He focuses on the word of God—scripture—in the context of these acts of worship through which we become members of the body of Christ. Fr. Donohue tells us about people who are receiving the sacraments of initiation, and we see the biblical witness (outlined in chapter 1) coming alive in their lives. In response to the chapter, the reader is invited to walk through a similar reflection on the liturgy. God's word of justice in the liturgy, we should remember, is always an offer of grace.

In chapter 3, Rodica Stoicoiu writes on the "Eucharist and Social Justice." Later in the book (in chapter 8), the term social justice will be considered in

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philosophical terms. We will see that "social" justice is concerned with how we—as individuals but especially in our communities—should order our lives to the common good. In her chapter, Dr. Stoicoiu heightens our awareness of what is happening to us in the celebration of the Eucharist and how we are called by God to new life. She presents the theology of God's self-giving in Jesus Christ and helps us understand the significance of our liturgical actions—not only what we do but also the silence that we so often want to fill with noise. The fundamental point of the chapter is that we are formed, through the Eucharist, into the body of Christ. The discussion that follows the chapter is a reflection on our eating habits. It is an exercise in understanding how our worship might transform our everyday lives.

In chapter 4, John Donovan introduces us to the founding document of modern Catholic social teaching, Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*. Note the phrase "modern" Catholic social teaching. The first three chapters of the book draw from our continuity with the ancient church: scripture and worship. Chapter 5 will discuss St. Augustine (354–430), and chapter 8 attends to the thought of Thomas Aquinas (13th c.). In other words, Leo XIII does not provide a new beginning of Christian thought on social and economic life. Rather, he provides a statement of Catholic thought in the language of modern social philosophy and in relationship to specifically modern social problems. These two points will be made by Dr. Donovan. He will show how Pope Leo XIII gives us an orientation to contemporary questions by transforming the individualism of modern political theory. At stake, according to Donovan, is how we understand what it means to be human. Following the chapter, we will consider how a Christian conception of the human being shapes our understanding of property and our work (especially in terms of relationships at work).

Outline: Part Two—Love

In chapter 5, William Collinge provides a concise but rich presentation of Augustine's life and thought. Augustine's writings and his reflections on his own life are voluminous, so it is no easy task to put his life and work in clear focus. In "Saint Augustine of Hippo: Love, Community, and Politics," Dr. Collinge explains central ideas in Augustine's work and helps us understand his influence on Christian theology and contemporary social ethics. After outlining the context of Augustine's thought, Collinge explains Augustine's understanding of love and friendship as well as his theology of the church and his famous description of the two cities, earthly and heavenly.

Collinge gives us a framework to understand Augustine's call to participate in the good of the earthly city (working toward an earthly peace), with our eyes trained on an entirely different and perfect love in the city of God. Following

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the chapter, we will consider our call to Christian love as it is developed in the modern document, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. In chapter 6, Dr. Collinge goes further by setting Pope Benedict's encyclical on the love of God in its Augustinian context. In "A Contemporary Augustinian Approach to Love and Politics—Pope Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est*," he reviews Benedict XVI's account of love and his concern to show the unity between desiring love (*eros*) and self-giving love (*agape*). From this account of love, Collinge guides us through the complicated relationships, in *Deus Caritas Est*, between the church and the society, between our vocations of Christian love and the requirements of justice. In response to the chapter on Benedict XVI, we will discuss guidelines for Christian contributions to civic life as provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in their *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*.

The questions about political life, which are raised by chapters 5 and 6, culminate in David Cloutier's chapter on "Modern Politics and Catholic Social Teaching." The reader will find a great deal of continuity with other chapters as well. Dr. Cloutier begins with the same image used by Sr. Mary Kate Birge to introduce chapter 1: the image of a blindfold on the eyes of Lady Justice. He also treats, as John Donovan does, the problem of individualism in modern political thought. Dr. Cloutier skillfully interweaves contemporary documents (by John Paul II, for example) with everyday examples and reflection on modern habits of life. He shows how Catholic social teaching makes its way between the problems of individualism and collectivism. Following this chapter, we will consider the current debate on health-care reform (which usually swings between individualism and collectivism) and how we might respond in terms of Catholic social thought and on the basis of community practices and the common good.

Outline: Part Three—Justice

Part 3 begins with chapter 8: "Natural Law—St. Thomas Aquinas and the Role of Reason in Social Order." In this chapter Joshua P. Hochschild presents a stream of Catholic thought that differs from, but complements, the chapters on scripture, worship, Augustine, and love. Dr. Hochschild introduces the topic of justice by presenting basic questions of Greek (and therefore Western) philosophy. The chapter provides a clear elucidation of Aristotle's framework of natural justice and law. In the Catholic tradition the Augustinian, scriptural, and Aristotelian stream come together in the theology of Thomas Aquinas. Hochschild explains Aquinas's social philosophy with particular emphasis on the ordering of the members of society to the common (what in the tradition is called "subsidiarity"). In the discussion that follows the chapter, we will consider two key subsidiary institutions: labor associations and the family.

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The title of chapter 9, "Modern Economy and the Social Order," indicates the thematic connection with the discussion of natural law and the social order in chapter 8. The discussion that follows this chapter, for example, will discuss the exchange of goods through subsidiary institutions in the fair-trade movement. In this chapter David McCarthy shows that considerations of economic life, in Catholic social thought, set economic exchange and contracts within a broader framework of social roles and duties. Modern economic theory tends in the opposite direction. Economics is considered a free-standing realm of behavior where exchange is ruled by disinterested mechanisms. Catholic social thought, in contrast, considers economic exchange within the context of our callings in social life and in terms of the common good.

The subsequent chapter, by Kathy Dow Magnus, presents a thoroughly relational—Catholic and personalist—view of material goods and the place they ought to occupy in our lives. In this part of the book (part 3), we move from Greek philosophy and natural law back to the call of Christian discipleship. In the chapter Dr. Magnus puts us face-to-face with a gospel imperative, one that cannot be neglected in any extended discussion of social and economic life: "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matt. 19:21). The chapter tells the story of Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and the Catholic worker movement, which was formed and spread in the United States in the 1930s. The Catholic worker movement, among others things, opened houses of hospitality so that Catholic workers might share life with the poor. In the words of Dorothy Day, "The mystery of poverty is that by sharing in it, making ourselves poor in giving to others, we increase our knowledge and belief in love." In response to this chapter, we will discuss whether or not hospitality to the poor is possible for ordinary families. Is such hospitality possible only for extraordinary people who live with the poor and apart from the rest of us?

Outline: Part Four—Moving Forward

We have titled the last part of our project "moving forward." Chapters 11 and 12 consider ways to sustain community and our desires to live truthfully in a context of moral and religious pluralism. Chapter 13 on the "greening" of Catholic social teaching frames our responsibilities as citizens of the earth in terms of a sacramental understanding of creation. We have placed this chapter last because it presents, in clear relief, some critical challenges of Catholic social teaching—how to sustain just social relations and how to act and to change our lives for the sake of the common good.

In Chapter 11, Richard Buck examines the conflicts and tensions that are produced for the Catholic church when faced with the rise of the modern secular state. The church and its social philosophy develop out of the medieval

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consensus of Christianity, so that understanding where to stand in relationship to secularism and a plurality of religions is no easy matter. Dr. Buck offers a careful treatment of *Dignitatis Humanae*, the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, which was written at the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in 1965. Buck shows that religious freedom is understood not as a concession or a lesser of evils, but as a positive good that respects the inherent freedom of the human being—a freedom that is at the heart of faith and includes the call to make one's faith active in social life. Following this chapter, we will take a look at statements by John Paul II and Benedict XVI and the connections they make between freedom, nonviolence, and truth. We will also consider the fruits of dialogue between Catholics and Jews and their common social concerns.

Trudy Conway, in chapter 12, highlights a problem of moral pluralism. Too often our goals of tolerance overshadow our social concerns for living truthfully and working for the common good. In "Compassion and Hospitality," Dr. Conway proposes that hospitality is the alternative to the indifference of passive tolerance. She defines hospitality as openness and welcome to others for the sake of living truthfully. Such hospitality to the stranger and to those who are quite different from us is animated by the same compassion that moves us to love what is good. These are only definitions. In contrast, Dr. Conway shows us the meaning of hospitality by telling the story of the people of Le Chambon, a mountain village that provided Jews refuge during the Nazi occupation of France. She skillfully weaves the story with key documents in Catholic social teaching (e.g., the synod of bishops "Justice in the World," 1971). The apt reflection and response to the chapter, in the discussion following the chapter, is to tell Trudy Conway's story of hospitality. She has put hospitality in action in her work to abolish the death penalty in Maryland. Her story serves as a guide for how we might move forward in relation to other critical issues of our time.

Finally, in chapter 13 Brian Henning offers us a perspective on environmental ethics. Often books and articles on the environment will emphasize impending disaster in order to move us to action. Dr. Henning, in contrast, develops our relationship to the earth in terms of a God-centered view of creation. Our stewardship of nature is simply part of the web of relationships that constitute who we are as human beings. Theologically, Dr. Henning draws on what Catholic theology calls a sacramental orientation to creation from addresses by both John Paul II and Benedict XVI, as well as documents by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In response to this chapter, the discussion shows that the problem of global warming is a problem of social ethics—a problem, as Dr. Henning argues, of our relationships. Global climate change is a challenge to how we are able to work together—personally, communally, and collectively—and to do so in a way that requires us to change, together, how we live. These are fundamental challenges of Catholic social teaching.

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Part One

Sources

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1

Biblical Justice

Mary Katherine Birge, SSJ

In twenty-first century Western society, we usually conceive of justice as a matter of being fair. That is, we believe justice means that every person ought to receive an equal amount of whatever is under discussion, no matter what his or her life circumstances may be. Every citizen is equal under the law. We often translate this to mean every citizen is the same under the law. In the United States the familiar image of a blindfolded goddess, Lady Justice, holding up the scales of justice and weighing out the "fair," the "just," or even the same amount for each petitioner under the law adorns many of our court buildings. This figure decorates not only the pediment of the U.S. Supreme Court building, but appears often in the opening sequence of television series devoted to stories about crime, punishment, and the rendering of justice according to constitutional law (for example, any one of the *Law and Order* or *CSI* episodes). In addition to this picture of blindfolded Lady Justice, the familiar sayings "equal justice under the law" and "justice is blind" also signal how the ideal of impartiality or objectivity has shaped Western society's vision of what is just. Members of our society, for the most part, presume that justice is cold and detached. Ironically, this so-called detachment protects and privileges those who least need such protecting or privileging. Such "blind" justice tends not to consider the leper and the poor, but would rather overlook their needs. To acknowledge their needs would be to acknowledge

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that the privileged and the disadvantaged belong to the same society. The privileged would have to acknowledge that they are inextricably bound to the poor through their common life. So they refuse their shared identity, blind themselves through objectivity and dispassion toward suffering, and practice detachment rather than mercy. In the biblical world, however, the concept of justice (sometimes called righteousness) binds every human being to relationships full of compassion.

The First Stories

In the Bible justice is based on the relationship between God and human beings and the relationship among human beings themselves. Both the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with other human beings must be in balance in order for justice or righteousness to exist. If either part of this equation is out of balance, the other is too. Only when the demands of a particular human relationship are met is the vertical relationship between God and the person in balance. And only when the demands of the divine/human relationship are being met, is the horizontal relationship between human persons in balance. The initial stories of Genesis illustrate the reason for justice based on relationship and demonstrate how injustice arises when the human being fails to meet the demands of either part of the divine-to-human or human-to-human equation.

In Genesis 1, human beings, male and female, are created in the image and in the likeness of God (Gen. 1:27). Because they bear the image of their divine creator, who is the source and summit of all justice, when human beings act with justice they reveal both the justice of God and their own fidelity to living out of that image of God in them. When they fail to act with justice, that is, to mirror the likeness of God in their dealing with one another or with God, the rightness or trueness of their relationship both with God and other human beings is affected adversely. This happens much the way a bicycle wheel loses its ability to run true when one of its spokes fails to maintain a torque to the rim proportionate to the torque of all the other spokes of the wheel. Its relationship with the other spokes and the wheel's rim is out of whack, and, as a result, the whole wheel—spokes, rim, hub, and tire—cannot attain the purpose for which it was created. So it is for us human beings.

In Genesis 3:1–24, the story of the first man and first woman and their failed relationship with God portrays the justice of God. We see first their failure to act justly toward God and one another and then, from God's subsequent actions toward them (expulsion from the garden, provision of protective clothing, and perseverance on God's part to continue in relationship with them and their offspring), we discover that the practice of mercy (along with judgment) is a constitutive element of God's justice. These actions by the first man and

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woman also reveal that the exercise of justice or of injustice by human beings always discloses the state of their relationship with the divine; that is, either in or out of balance. Two fundamentals must be kept in mind as we move ahead to examine more explicit calls in the Bible to practice justice. First, justice proceeds to human beings from God (of whom it is constitutive) by virtue of their creation in God's image. Second, justice is relational, and its fulfillment depends upon our meeting the demands of life lived with others and our call to be faithful to God in relation to the world.

Desert Experience

In the Old Testament there are three terms which, along with their related forms, denote the enactment or the quality of what we have named biblical justice. They are: *tsedeq* (and its feminine form *tsĕdāqāh*), *mishpāt*, and *dîn*. Each of these words and their Hebrew cognates illustrates some aspect of the notion that God is the source of justice or righteousness, that God reveals justice or righteousness, and that God expects human beings to practice it in their dealings with one another and with God. In the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, after God has liberated the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from Pharoah's oppression and the burden of Egypt's injustice, the Holy One establishes through Moses a new society in which the practice of justice extends to the powerless as well as to the powerful, to the poor as well as to the wealthy, and to the outsider as well as to the insider (Exod. 12:49; 22:21–23; Deut. 25:19). In Exodus 22:26–27 we hear God charge Israel through Moses:

> If ever you take your neighbor's garment in pledge,[1] you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down; for that is his only covering, it is his mantle for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

And similarly, in Deuteronomy 24:11–13 we hear again:

> When you make your neighbor a loan of any sort, you shall not go into his house to fetch his pledge. You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you. And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge; when the sun goes down you shall restore to him the pledge that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you; and it shall be righteousness [*tsĕdāqāh*] to you before the Lord your God.

The practice of justice (or righteousness) that is promoted in both these examples illustrates how integral the notion of relationship is to the very nature of justice. In the example from Exodus, the exercise of justice (restoring to the

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poor person before night falls the cloak one has taken in pledge) entails the lender's relationship with the borrower, the lender's relationship with God, and the borrower's relationship with God. The lender has the option of withholding the neighbor's pledge until reimbursed, as long as the poor person is not without the rudimentary shelter of a cloak at night. But when the poverty of the neighbor will cause her to be without the most basic of night shelters, the lender must return the neighbor's only shelter for the night, even without her making good on the bond. Why?

The lender is certainly worthy of being reimbursed what was lent. But the immediacy of the borrower's basic human need for night shelter, and the human misery which would ensue for the borrower were she to pass the night unprotected from the elements—these trump the lender's legitimate but deferrable need for material reimbursement. Torah requires such an exercise of mercy (or compassion) toward one creature by another because compassion is as elemental a component of God's justice as is the necessity to hold every creature accountable for her choices (Exod. 22:27; cf. Gen. 2:18; 3:21; 4:15). The lender has a relationship with the neighbor that is based on the divine image they both bear (Gen. 1:27). That image of God, shared by all humanity, requires each person to imitate God. To remain in right relationship with God, to continue to live justly, the lender must apply mercy even as she seeks accountability. For, as Exodus 22:27 indicates, God is not objective or impartial where the poor and oppressed are concerned. God will hear their cries because God is compassionate as virtually every prophet taught since the kingship was established and Israel became a nation among the nations.

In the Land

With Moses in the desert, God had fashioned Israel into a society based on just relationships. When the people came into the land, God had to summon forth individuals who had remained faithful to that desert vision of justice to bid the powerful and haughty to remember what God required of them: "to act with justice" (Mic. 6:8b), especially toward those who could not demand it for themselves: the weak and the poor. In the tenth century, when David stole Bathsheba away from her husband and arranged his murder, the prophet Nathan spoke a parable of injustice to David the king (2 Sam.11–12). David, roused by the story, rightly proclaimed judgment at such an injustice done by a powerful and wealthy man to one of the weakest and least among his people. "That man is you!" was Nathan's cry (12:7), and David recognized himself, his guilt, and the ruin he had made of his relationship with God in the shambles he had made of his relationship with Bathsheba and Uriah. The king too was not above, or exempt from, the demands justice required of every human relationship in Israel. To honor the Lord God, to remain in right relationship

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with the Holy One, to offer right worship, each person, whether of exalted status or not, had to act with justice in everyday interactions.

The introduction of kingship and urbanization had brought radical changes to Israel. The community would need the continuous activity of prophets like Nathan to challenge those with power and wealth in Judah and Israel, and make clear to them through prophetic utterance and action that their temple offerings, sacrifices, and worship were unacceptable—were worthless before God—without their acting justly toward every member of the community. We see this connection made between right worship of God and right relationship with members of the community, to a greater or lesser degree, in the writing of almost every prophet of the Old Testament. I choose four to examine more closely how they shaped their cry for justice for the poor and the weak.

Amos prophesied in the eighth century when the northern kingdom was in its last decades of existence. He had the unenviable task of preaching to a rather wealthy and comfortable population that all was not well between them and the God whom they professed to worship. They were being judged on their practice of justice and found grievously wanting. In 5:21–24 he wrote:

> I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
>
> Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon.
>
> Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Amos is searing in his condemnation of worship offered without the connected and requisite practice of justice in everyday life by people who claim to worship God. It is no mere chance that in a desert clime Amos compared the necessity of acting with justice to that most essential of elements required for human life—water, and not just any kind of water, but water that was abundant, living, and unending. Earlier in his book, he already had preached:

> For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes—they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted; a man and his father go in to the same maiden so that my holy name is profaned; they lay themselves down beside every altar upon garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined. (2:6–8)

Those in power, who lived in security and in plenty, Amos judged fiercely, as fiercely as he had judged Israel's enemies arrayed about her (cf. 1:3–2:5). The powerful of Israel had failed to remember that the needy, the poor, the

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afflicted, the borrower, and the wrongly fined bear the image of God. They had ignored at their peril the injunctions of Exodus (e.g., 22:26–27) and Deuteronomy (e.g., 24:11–13) against abusing the weak and indigent. They had forgotten that God has a vested interest in the broken and the lost and will champion them every time.

Later, Jeremiah continued in the southern kingdom the work of Amos and other prophets by criticizing the uneven distribution of wealth among the citizens of Judah and linking their mistreatment of the poor with false worship. In the temple he preached:

> For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to you fathers forever. (7:5–7)

He conveyed God's abhorrence at their false worship (Jer. 7:8–11), connected their failure to live justly with their failure to worship rightly, and set before them a choice which echoed the one offered Israel in Deuteronomy 30:19–20: (1) walk in the way of the Lord—that is, "execute justice with one another"—and live, or (2) persist in the oppression of "the alien, the fatherless or the widow" and perish (viz., Jer. 5:28; 7:13–15; 9:12b–16). For their failure to heed the desires of God, Jeremiah rendered oracles of God's judgment against them as other prophets had (e.g., Amos 5:10–12) and other prophets would (e.g., Ezek. 18:25–32). Yet these same prophets, and others still, also spoke to Israel of another component of biblical justice: God's compassion.

In the midst of Babylon's final siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah acted out a prophecy of hope he had received. At a time when it appeared to any right-thinking inhabitant of Jerusalem that God had finally and irrevocably washed the divine hands of Israel, Jeremiah bought a parcel of land. After he took great care to see that the deed was recorded and witnessed, he carefully sealed it in a clay jar and buried it, to be found at a time in the future when Israel had once more returned to live in the land (32:6–15). God's judgment of Israel was to be tempered by God's compassion and refusal to abandon this people. Ezekiel continued in this tradition of prophecy when he preached to the first wave of exiles to Babylon (597–87 BC).

Their worship of God had to include the practice of righteousness; they had to keep the God of Israel's commands to care for the weak, the poor, the widow, and the orphan in order for God to find them without reproach. Worship without the practice of justice was not worship.

> If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right—if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman in her time of impurity, does

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> not oppress any one, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any increase, withholds his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between [one person and another], walks in my statues, and is careful to observe my ordinances—he is righteous, he shall surely live, says the Lord God. (Ezek. 18:5–9)

The prophet foresaw the end of Israel as God's judgment on the people (Ezek. 21:1–32). Before the final deportation (587 BC), Ezekiel had focused on Israel's failure to observe God's ordinances, evident in the Israelites' treatment of those who lived on the margins of their society. After the final destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, Ezekiel sounded a voice of hope to the exiled community about Israel's future. He envisioned a rebuilding of the land and the temple that was accompanied by a renewal of just relationship among the peoples (Ezek. 40–48), bonds consonant with the image of God they continued to bear (Gen. 1:27). At the end of the almost fifty-year exile, when Israel had returned to the land and had begun to rebuild city and temple, the prophet, known by scholars as Third Isaiah (Isa. 56–66), noticed the cost of such projects on some in the community who could least stand to bear it, and he began to preach.

He preached in order to make visible those who had become invisible, to recall for those, hell-bent on recreating worship of God to fit their own image, what folly they practiced. Third Isaiah focused on their claim to practice right worship (today we might say orthodox worship). He tied God's rejection of such worship, and so of them, to their own rejection of the poor around them (58:3–4). He reframed the demands of right worship so they might recognize that their compassionate interaction with the least able and most vulnerable among them comprised the kind of worship—the right worship—that God sought from them (58:5–10). Their relationship with God depended on their meeting the demands, the needs, of the poor, the widow, and the orphan around them.

Like the prophets who had gone before him, Third Isaiah recognized justice not as something to be measured, weighed, or apportioned equally to every member of society no matter the circumstance. To practice justice (*tsĕdāqāh*) was to follow the ordinances (*mishpāt*, viz. Deut. 24–25) given by God in Torah. In order to offer worship acceptable to God, Israel had to be in a state of right relationship with God. To be in that state of right relationship with God, they had to be in right relationship with the least and poorest among them. This balance could only be achieved by the people of Israel practicing compassion, corporately as well as individually, with every bearer of God's image (cf. Gen. 1:27). When the time came that such justice ruled in the land, prophets of the Old Testament proclaimed it would be a time of *shalōm*; it would be the reign of God. This was what Amos declared when he cried,

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> "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "when the one plowing shall over take the reaper and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land which I have given them." (Amos 9:13–15; cf. Joel 2:21–29; Mic. 4:1–4)

Shalōm Israel understood to be the time when God would rule at last (cf. Isa. 52:7), when God would vanquish every injustice and act of violence, when sickness and disfigurement would be healed forever, the people would never again hunger or thirst, and justice would be restored to all. It was this time of peace with justice (*shalōm*) that Jesus announced had begun in him (Luke 4:16–21). It was for this work of reshaping the world into God's hope for it that Jesus invited his disciples to join him.

Jesus, Justice, and the Reign of God

Every time Jesus performed a miracle by healing illness, by exorcizing evil spirits, or by restoring persons to this life, he was simultaneously revealing and enacting the reign of God. He was making present in an unjust and broken world the justice of God. In Mark 1:40–45 (cf. Matt. 8:2–4; Luke 5:12–16), when Jesus was in the early stages of his Galilean ministry, a leper sought him out to be healed.

Leprosy is a contagious disease, first recognizable to the human eye through skin lesions. If it remains untreated by antibiotics, the illness becomes progressively disfiguring and debilitating, eventually resulting in a person's death. In the first-century world, society protected its members the only way it knew how, by forcibly expelling from the community anyone who seemed to have even the most remote chance of being infected with leprosy (cf. Lev. 13–14; Deut. 24:8). In first-century Judea, this expulsion from human society was a death sentence. The leper would be certain of a death that would come more rapidly and be more miserable than what the leprosy itself would have inflicted. A human being could not survive long this harsh and violent world without a community with which to share the burdens and from which to receive support in the eking out of one's daily existence. These were the circumstances of the leper who begged Jesus to heal him.

By restoring the leper to health, Jesus restored him to life and restored a piece of God's justice to the world. Jesus was moved by compassion at the leper's plea. He risked his own health—physical and communal–when "he stretched out his hand and touched him" (v. 41). When Jesus practiced God's justice, and so God's compassion, he revealed something of God and something of God's hope for the world. The prophets before Jesus had denounced the rich

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and powerful when they ignored the plight of the weak; they had decried the conduct of the rich which increased the poor's misery, and they had called the privileged of their society to recognize the demands stemming from relationship with God for their relationship with their neighbor. Jesus's actions in this story signal that same concern: to make right the people's relationship with God by making possible the people's relationships with one another.

Every time Jesus preached a parable to his disciples and crowds gathered to hear him, he was simultaneously revealing the reign of God and inviting his listeners to join him in practicing God's reign and justice. In Matthew 20:1–16, Jesus presented a scene familiar to his listeners: a collection of day laborers, gathered in a locale, waiting for some landowner to hire them so that they might scratch out a meager day's wage by working in his vineyard. If they were workers hiring themselves out on a daily basis in first-century Judea, it meant they had become landless or, at the very least, the land which they had been working for themselves had not produced sufficiently to feed the worker and his family and also cover heavy taxes imposed by Rome and whatever local vassal-king they might owe. They were one day's wage away from having to sell themselves into slavery to make ends meet.

Jesus's vineyard owner comes five times to the marketplace to hire workers for that day. Each time he comes to hire the workers, time has moved on. Early in the morning, he has agreed to pay the first group of workers a set price for the day's work, one denarius (v. 2). With each subsequent group he hires, he agrees simply to pay "whatever is just" (v. 4). The vineyard owner's unanticipated generosity turns, and the parable's disconcerting ending hangs, on this word "just" (*dikaion* in Greek and *tsaddîq* in Hebrew). From the first to the last, each who had been hired received a wage sufficient to live on for the next day. The first group had agreed to the price. The later groups had agreed to what was "just."

The parable leads to various reversals of expectations. The most surprising reversal for the characters and listeners of the story is that all the laborers received the same amount of pay, whether they worked for an hour or a day. All received the exact amount to which the first group had agreed. The surprise in the story came because the owner did not prorate the wages of all the workers according the amount of time each had worked. Rather, he paid each worker a living wage. The amount of this wage reflected the landowner's awareness that to be in right or just relationship with God, one must be in right or just relationship with one's neighbor. Jesus was demonstrating what the law and the prophets had taught about justice—one's daily interactions with other human beings affect and reveal the state of one's relationship with God. Every time Jesus challenged notions of what constituted justice, he was revealing God's hope and desire for the kind of relationships the stories of Genesis 1–2 had disclosed, the Torah had prescribed (e.g., Exod. 12:49; 22:21–27; Deut. 25:19), and the prophets had preached (e.g., Isa. 1:12–17; 61:1–4; Mic. 6:6–8; Mal. 3:5).

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Conclusion

We human beings image God and so, at our deepest and most elemental place of being, the justice we seek and the justice we give is God's. Biblical justice is not fair; that is, it is not disinterested or detached in the face of suffering. Rather, it is united to compassion. Like us, it is bound because of its relationship to the reign and justice of God. As a result, it does not treat everyone anonymously, but looks to who we are and what we need to become the human beings for whom God has longed from before history began. In other words, biblical justice will always privilege the needs of those without the basics for a dignified life over the wants of those who live in abundant prosperity. It will always be personal and relational because biblical justice derives its meaning and authority from the relationship God has established with human beings, embodied by Jesus.

Discussion

Justice, Mercy, and the Good Samaritan

Mary Kate Birge's essay on biblical justice makes clear that Christian worship and discipleship call us to the way of God's justice. But questions and problems about how to live "in Christ" emerge almost as soon as Christians gather in Christ's name. We need only to consider the letters of Paul in the New Testament. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, Paul expresses shock and exasperation that the Christians in Corinth are divided when they share the Lord's Supper.

> [W]hen you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. . . . Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat of the Lord's Supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? (1 Cor. 11:18–22).

This problem of humiliating the poor, along with Paul's judgments against it, is strikingly similar to the prophetic tradition outlined by Sr. Birge. The prophets speak the word of God to the people and show the intimate connection between worship and God's righteousness—which is both God's judgment and compassion.

As a matter of discussion, let us make a shift from Paul's worries about divisions in Corinth to our typical ways of reading scripture. Like the Lord's

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Supper, scripture is shared during worship. In the liturgy of the word, we hear the gospel read and proclaimed and we respond with one voice (particularly through the prayers of the people and the creed). But I wonder if our habits of responding to the Bible tend toward the individualistic and might reveal divisions and factions among us. We are accustomed, as we should be, to hearing the scripture as the word of God spoken to us and in our lives. How often do we take the "for us" of salvation in Jesus Christ to be only a "for me"? Do our factions and divisions appear because we isolate ourselves in our towns or suburbs? How often do we avoid humiliating those who have nothing by simply living and worshipping far apart from them? We hear scripture as the word directed to us, and we all know that the word is not simply for our comfort. The chapter notes that God's justice is God's compassion, and we also know that God's compassion might be God's judgment on our lives. We are called to hear and "have ears"—to hear the gospel as a call to live in Christ and to live out Christ's way—to hear the word of God's justice as a call to move beyond our factions and divisions.

Sr. Mary Kate has outlined the following reflection for us.

Read through the following parable from Luke. The larger context for this parable-generating conversation between Jesus and the lawyer is the large section of the gospel which Luke uses to instruct members of his own community (AD 85–90) about how to follow Jesus as they wait for his return (9:52–19:27). Recall the basic definition of biblical justice in the chapter and the principles on which it is based. Use those as the filters through which you try to answer the basic question modern believers must raise whenever we read a biblical text: So what? So what does this text mean for me today as a follower of Jesus in the twenty-first century?

> [10:25] And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" [26] He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" [27] And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." [28] And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live." [29] But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" [30] Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. [31] Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. [32] So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, [34] and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. [35] And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you

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> spend, I will repay you when I come back.' [36] Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" [37] He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Below are some questions for us to ponder as we try to determine what this passage means for us today and how it might shape our own practices of biblical justice:

- What question does the lawyer first ask Jesus?
- What connections can we draw between the lawyer's answer in v. 27 to Jesus's counterquestion in v. 26 and the concept of biblical justice found in the chapter you have just read?
- Why does the lawyer ask Jesus a second question in v. 29?
- In v. 36 what question does Jesus ask the lawyer? How is this question from Jesus connected, or not connected, to the question the lawyer asks in v. 29?
- We ought to ask ourselves the same question the lawyer asked of Jesus in v. 29: "And who is my neighbor?" What are our answers? How do our answers help us respond to the initial question in this exercise: So what? So what does this passage mean for us today as followers of Jesus in the twenty-first-century?

Keep your responses to these questions in mind as we move on to a discussion of worship in the next two chapters. The parable of the good Samaritan calls us into community with the despised Samaritan (as we put ourselves in the place of the lawyer), and with those who suffer (as Jesus draws near to the leper). More importantly, perhaps, the neighbor is the one who shows compassion. Here, we might think of the good Samaritan as an image of God in Christ, the one who meets us on the roadside, attends to our wounds, and gives us respite at an inn. In liturgy (as we will see in the next two chapters), we receive the hospitality of God to live it out in our homes and communities.

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