

Oblate School of Theology
National Retreat
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Being Disciples of Jesus in Charity, Justice, and Prophecy - Why Simply Being Good-hearted is not Enough

Sessions ...

1. **Monday AM** - What is Social Justice and its distinctiveness from Charity
 2. **Monday Afternoon** – The Place of Social Justice with Christian Spirituality as a whole
 3. **Monday Evening** – Some Principles from Scripture and Church Teachings

 4. **Tuesday AM** – Justice and the Ecological Crisis
 5. **Tuesday Evening** – One major social justice issue – *The Inequality of Women*

 6. **Wednesday AM** – One major social justice issue – *Justice and End of Life Issues*
(Monsignor Jerry McCarthy)
 7. **Wednesday PM** – One major social justice issue – *Justice and Abortion*

 8. **Thursday AM** – Ten Principles for Christian Prophecy
 9. **Thursday PM** – Quiet Prophecy
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Monday AM - What is Social Justice and its distinctiveness from Charity

- “*The glory of God is the poor person fully alive!*” - Gustavo Gutierrez
- “*The poor are those who don’t have the right to have rights!*” Gustavo Gutierrez
- “*Any preaching that is not good news for the poor is not the gospel of Jesus Christ*” – Jim Wallis
- “*Peace will not be won without the moral equivalent of the loss and suffering and separation that war itself is exacting.*” – Daniel Berrigan

What is social justice? A key distinction

- A story – “Looking up the river”
- A distinction between “charity” and “justice”

- “Charity” responds to the immediate wound (often because some injustice has been dealt a person).
- “Justice” tries to get to and un-root the cause the wound.
- Why being individually “good-hearted” is not enough
- Justice therefore tries to deal with unjust structures – it works for “systemic change”

1. Major Social Justice Issues

- Issues to do with poverty, unjust economic systems, unjust wages, racism, abortion, sexism, the ecology, climate change, immigration, refugees, historical seizure of lands and culture, human trafficking, access to health care and education, among others.
- Their interconnectedness - Concern for one issue demands concern for all these issues.

2. Some Key Figures and Authors

- Dorothy Day
- Gustavo Gutierrez
- Jim Wallis
- Pope Francis
- Pope John Paul II
- Daniel Berrigan
- Bryan Hehir
- Bryan Stevenson
- William Stringfellow
- Bishop Tutu
- Allan Boesak
- Dennis Hurley
- Larry Rosebaugh.
- John Dear
- Jim Forest

Monday Afternoon – The Place of Social Justice with Christian Spirituality as a whole

The Place of Social Justice within Christian Spirituality as a Whole

Four non-negotiable pillars constitute the foundation for a healthy Christian spirituality:

- Private prayer and private morality** – personal honesty and integrity, keeping the commandments and striving for a personal relationship with Christ.
- Social Justice and Charity** – reaching out to the poor
- A Commitment to an Ecclesial Community** – some experience of “church”
- Mellowness and graciousness of heart** – the right motivation and fuel for action

Monday Evening – Some Principles from Scripture and Church Teachings

A. From Scripture ...

- The challenge to reach out to the poor and to practice justice is a non-negotiable mandate given to every Christian, just as non-negotiable as is the mandate to keep the commandments. This is clear in both Testaments in the Bible:
 - i. The great Jewish prophets coined this mantra: *The quality of your faith will be judged by the quality of justice in the land; and the quality of justice in the land will always be judged by how “widows, orphans, and strangers” (biblical code for the weakest and most vulnerable groups in a given society) are doing.*
 - ii. Jesus not only ratifies this, he deepens it further by stating that his very presence and person are in the poor. (Matthew 25 – “*Whatsoever you do to the least, you do to me!*”)
 - iii. In the New Testament:
 - One in every ten lines is a challenge to us to reach out to the poor.
 - In the Gospel of Luke, this challenge is in every 6th line
 - In the Letter of James, this challenge is in every 5th line
 - iv. The Law of Moses assumed that everything we have belongs to God and is not really ours. We are only its stewards and guardians. We may enjoy it at God’s pleasure, but ultimately it’s not ours. (Leviticus 25,23)
 - Every seventh year, all slaves were to be set free and each was to take with him or her enough of the master’s goods to be able to live an independent life. (Deuteronomy 15, 14).
 - Every seventh year all economic debts were to be cancelled (the original meaning of the “statute of limitations”).
 - Every seventh year one’s land was to lie fallow and enjoy its own Sabbath. During that year, the land’s owner not only didn’t sow anything, he or she didn’t reap anything either. The poor were to reap whatever the fields and vineyards produced that year.
 - And, at all times, landowners were forbidden to reap and harvest the corners of their fields, with the intent that these edges were to be reaped by the poor.
 - Finally, even more radically, every fiftieth year all lands were to be restored to the original tribe or household who had first owned them. One’s “ownership” of property had a certain time limit. Things weren’t yours forever.
 - Moreover, doing all of this was not considered as virtue; these were laws, legal obligations.

B. From Church Teachings ...

- Most of us have been raised to believe that we have right to possess whatever comes to us honestly, either through our own work or through legitimate inheritance. No

matter how large that wealth might be, it's ours as long as we didn't cheat anyone along the way. By and large, this belief has been enshrined in the laws of democratic countries and we generally believe that it is morally sanctioned by the Christianity.

- But here is a brief summary of the Social Teachings of the Roman Catholic Church – teachings very much endorsed by leading social justice figures in other Christian Churches (e.g., Jim Wallis, Bishop Tutu, William Stringfellow, and Allan Boesak).
- i. God intended the earth and everything in it for the sake of all human beings.
 - ii. Thus, in justice, created goods should flow fairly to all. All other rights are subordinated to this principle. (*Gaudium et Spes* 69, *Popularum Progressio* 22)
 - iii. We do have a right to private ownership and no one may ever deny us of this right (*Rerum Novarum* 3-5, 14, *Quadragesimo Anno* 44-56, *Mater et Magistra* 109) but that right is subordinated to the common good, to the fact that goods are intended for everyone. (*Laborem Exercens* 14)
 - iv. Wealth and possessions must be understood as ours to steward rather than to possess absolutely. (*Rerum Novarum* 18-19)
 - v. No person (or nation) may have a surplus if others do not have the basic necessities. (*Rerum Novarum* 19, *Quadragesimo Anno* 50-51, *Mater et Magistra* 119-121 & 157-165, *Popularum Progressio* 23)
 - vi. People are obliged to come to the relief of the poor and if a person is in extreme necessity he has the right to take from the riches of others what he needs. (*Gaudium et Spes* 69)
 - vii. The present economic situation in the world must be redressed. (*Popularum Progressio* 6, 26, 32, *Gaudium et Spes* 66, *Octogesimus Adveniens* 43, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* 43)
 - viii. Thus the law of supply and demand, free enterprise, competition, the profit motive, and the private ownership of the means of production may not be given complete free reign. They are not absolute rights and are only good within certain limits. (*Popularum Progressio* 26, *Quadragesimo Anno* 88, 110)
 - ix. In regards to the private ownership of industry and the means of production, two extremes are to be avoided: Unbridled capitalism on the one hand, and complete socialism on the other. (*Quadragesimo Anno* 46, 55, 111-126)
 - x. Governments must respect the principle of subsidiarity and intervene only when necessary. (*Rerum Novarum* 28-29, *Quadragesimo Anno* 79-80, *Mater et Magistra* 117-152) However when the common good demands it they not only may step in, they are obliged to do so. (*Popularum Progressio* 24, 33, *Mater et Magistra* 53, *Gaudium et Spes* 71)
 - xi. As well certain forms of property should be reserved for the state since they carry with them an opportunity of domination too great to be left to private individuals. (*Quadragesimo Anno* 114, *Mater et Magistra* 116)
 - xii. Governments may never sacrifice the individual to the collectivity because the individual is prior to civil society and society must be directed towards him or her. (*Mater et Magistra* 109, *Quadragesimo Anno* 26)
 - xiii. Employers must pay wages which allow the worker to live in a “reasonable and frugal comfort” (*Rerum Novarum* 34) and wages may not simply be a question of what contract a worker will accept. Conversely, workers may not claim that the produce and profits which are not required to repair and replace invested capital belong by right to them (*Quadragesimo Anno* 55, 114) and they must negotiate their wages with the common good

- in mind. (*Quadragesimo Anno 119, Mater et Magistra 112*) As is the case with the employer, it is not just a question of what kind of *contract can be extracted*.
- xiv. *Both the workers and the employers have an equal duty to be concerned for the common good. (Laborem Exercens 20)*
- xv. And, the condemnation of injustice is part of the ministry of evangelization and is an integral aspect of the Church's prophetic role. (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis 42*)
- xvi. Nature must be respected as having its own intrinsic rights and human impact on nature and climate must be taken as a moral issue.

C. [If there is time] Some key insights within Gutierrez' original vision of Liberation Theology - as supplemented by subsequent Liberation Theologians.

- i. God creates life, loves life, and empowers its ongoing vitality.
- ii. God loves everyone; there are no favorite ones or privileged ones in God's eyes.
- iii. Thus in all situations where there is injustice, unfairness, oppression, grinding poverty, either because of the direct action of some or through structures that cause the unfairness, *God is not neutral*. Rather God wants action against everything and everyone who deals injustice and death.
- iv. Thus, God is always on "the underside of history", with a "preferential option for the poor".
- v. However in dealing with those who are unjust, God desires their conversion rather than their deaths.
- vi. Gutierrez sees elements within our present culture and structures that are clearly "idolatrous", i.e., a worship (however unconscious) of something, a "graven image", that cannot give life. We have divinized money and its trappings and turned them into an absolute.
- vii. Among these idolatries too is our desire for comfort and the turning of a blind eye to whatever is needed to keep our comforts in place.
- viii. Like all false gods, these "gods" too require victims, human sacrifice, and inevitability it is the poor, the powerless, who get sacrificed.
- ix. This vision of things is meant to challenge the traditional preaching and catechesis of the churches which, too often, have put a Christian veneer over the face of this idol.
- x. The churches have, classically, done this by presenting God as an all-powerful Male/King/Lord who, by some process of divine right, empowers authorities (ecclesial and civil) to rule in his place – and our resistance to these authorities is tantamount to disobedience to God.
- xi. Thus, a certain concept of God (as seen above) helps pervert the real truth about God and puts God in the service of moneyed interests. (*"By deforming God we protect our own egotism. Our falsified and inauthentic ways of dealing with our fellow human beings are allied to our falsification of the idea of God. Our unjust society and our perverted idea of God are in close and terrible alliance."* Juan Segundo)

- xii. One of the images/metaphors that contemporary Liberation Theology likes to employ to image our ineffable God (in terms of God's solicitude for the poor) is that of God as Mother ... "Since if there is little food, a mother sees that it is fairly distributed." (Elizabeth Johnson)
- xiii. Everything within this critique can be seen clearly in both the person and the teachings of Jesus who, more radical even than the great prophets of Israel, both made a preferential option for the poor and identified his very presence and person with them
- xiv. A central part of Jesus mission on earth was to "bring good news to the poor", to take God's presence, physically, to the poor. Any Christian spirituality that does not make this one of its central points is not "Christian".