

In Search of the Good

A Catholic Understanding of Moral Living

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

Chapters 11 to 13

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Chapter 11

Freedom in a political and cultural context

Say among the nations, "The Lord is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity."
Psalm 96.10

Focus your learning

Cognitive; Describe how individualism has affected the notion of freedom in Western society.

Practical; Identify the pitfalls of individualism and utilitarianism.

Affective; You are never too busy to eat; neither are you too busy to feed your soul. Busy though your life may be, you will deprive it of its fruitfulness if you starve your soul. How do you feed your soul in the busyness of your life?

Key terms in this chapter

capitalism; commodity; consumerism; democracy; individualism; instrumental reason; liberalism; market; private property; relativism; social contract; utilitarianism

Key thinkers

Thomas Hobbes; John Locke; Jean-Jacques Rousseau; John Rawls; Charles Taylor

The making of modern society

We are accustomed to living in what most people consider to be a free society. We take for granted that we have the right to choose for ourselves where we live and how we live. We have the right to choose our own convictions and our religion. We have the freedom of speech and the freedom of association. We have the right to choose our occupation. We have learned to appreciate the freedoms that this type of society accords us and we tend to think of societies who do not promote the same freedoms as being undeveloped.

In the last chapter we looked at a host of rights we assume will protect us. Our legal system is set up to defend these rights and prevent others from infringing on them. But it was not always this way. Try to imagine living in another, very different, order of society prior to our current one. In the words of Charles Taylor:

People used to see themselves as part of a larger order. In some cases, this was a cosmic order ... in which humans figured in their proper place along with angels, heavenly bodies, and our fellow earthly creatures. This hierarchical order in the universe was reflected in the hierarchies of human society. People were often locked into a given place, a role and station that was properly theirs and from which it was almost unthinkable to deviate. Modern freedom came about through the discrediting of such orders. (1)

Replacing this society structured around a sacred cosmic order was the modern liberal democratic society. What brought about this dramatic shift? The establishment of the liberal democratic society goes back to the same period in history that we now identify as the beginning of modern time: the seventeenth century. From this time period, five beliefs began to emerge that today shape Western society's view of the world:

The belief in unlimited progress

The belief in the exclusive supremacy of reason

The belief in the supreme autonomy of the individual

The diagram above illustrates a traditional Hebrew view of the cosmos.
(diagram: omitted)

The belief in the ever-increasing domination and control of nature by human beings

The belief that success and efficiency are the two principle criteria for judging the worth of human beings and their activities

In this chapter, we will explore in particular the belief in the supreme autonomy of the individual. In the previous chapter we explored personal freedom. In this chapter, we move to an exploration of human freedom within a political and social context. In order to understand the current functioning of our political society it is helpful to see how some philosophers articulated the shift and contributed to its development. We will examine the political theories of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) as they emerged from the surge of individual freedoms.

Why do we select these particular thinkers? They are primarily political philosophers rather than moral philosophers. Their point of departure is the self-interest of an individual, and that individuals rights and freedoms. Their political theories have had a tremendous impact on our way of life; our liberal democracies have their origin in the thinking that came out of the seventeenth century. So too many of the difficulties that we are experiencing today lie in the basic principles of liberal democracy. We will also look at the influential work of a recent thinker, John Rawls (1921-2002), to show how the theories of the seventeenth century have persisted. We will examine both the positive and the more troubling aspects of modern liberal democracy as they touch on freedom in a political and cultural context.

Thomas Hobbes
(1588-1679)

Thomas Hobbes, scientist, philosopher and political theorist, was born in London in 1588. When he was only 15 years old, he began his study of the classics at Oxford University. For most of his life Hobbes made his living as a tutor for children of wealthy families, including, for a period, the future King Charles II. Most interesting about Hobbes is his political theory. He developed his political theory against the backdrop of the barbarous civil wars and the endless struggles in parliament that plagued England during his lifetime. Hobbes's position will hardly seem to us to be liberal and democratic, but he set the tone for how political obligation and rights might be deduced from the interest and will of individuals.

We begin with Hobbes's pessimistic description of human nature. He arrived at this picture by imagining what humans would be like if there were no rulers or law enforcement. Even with law enforcement, he says, an "uncivilized" person can never let down his guard: "When taking a journey, he armes himselfe, and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his doores; when even in his house he locks his chests." (2) For Hobbes this "natural" (as opposed to "civilized") individual would be in constant struggle with others. Everybody would seek to have power over others for fear of being overpowered themselves. There could be no peaceful living - no secure property, no industry, commerce, sciences, art, or literature - and everyone would live in constant danger of violent death. As he says in *Leviathan*, his most famous book, the life of each one would be "solitary, poore, nasty brutish, and short." (3) Or as he said in *De cive*, "Humans are wolves toward each other."

Thomas Hobbes
(image: omitted)

According to Hobbes, it is to avoid such an insecure, anti-social life - war of each with all – that people accept the sovereignty of an individual who has by violence taken power over them or to whom people have agreed to transfer their power to rule over them.

For Hobbes a human being is like a beast, a leviathan, that is set in motion by selfish desires and appetites. The highest of these appetites is the human will. Every human being is moved by these appetites to seek out that good which best serves his or her own self-interest. One human being differs from another by the degree of their drive for personal power. For Hobbes it is each person for him or herself always in competition with the passion for power of another. Each has a "restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death." (4)

For Hobbes this power of each individual is translated into market terms: I own this power and therefore I can negotiate with others over how I will use this power. Power is a commodity that I can trade with others. My power has value, worth, honour, and esteem in the eyes of others and I can barter with it just as the market barterers with money.

Here we see an individuals gifts beginning to be translated into market, or commodity language. Everything has a price. In the seventeenth century, this commodification of talents and skills was only in its first stage. Commodification of talents suggests that as owners of our personal gift and talents we have the right to put a market price on them. I can put them at the service of the market. To put it in modern terms, singer x can charge \$125.00 per ticket while singer y can demand only \$50.00 because the fame or esteem associated with each one's singing talent is evaluated as a commodity on an open market.

What Hobbes realized and articulated for the first time in history is that work is such a commodity. I can translate work into a value, a market price: in exchange for my work I contract a wage in accordance with the value that others (the market) give my work. This novelty of contracting out one's capacity to work was highly instrumental in creating the market or capitalist society that we know today. Hobbes was convinced that all human beings possess something that they can offer in the market. Furthermore, whereas land had been communally owned and was not bought or sold on the market, in Hobbes's time land was increasingly owned as "private property." It too could be bought and sold.

What would bind individuals who possess their skills, work, and talents together to form a society? What self-interest would be served? Hobbes is quite clear: it is fear of death. The basis of society therefore is a tacit contract where individuals give up some of their appetite for power in exchange for the security of using their powers without fear of extreme violence. A government is needed to protect the competition between the different appetites for power from deteriorating into murder. So society is really a transfer of rights and therefore an acceptance to limit one's power to a ruler, such as the king, in exchange for protection. From this need for protection comes the obligation to obey the ruler. Entering this contract is a free decision, according to Hobbes: I accept the obligation to obey. I limit my freedom in order to safeguard my freedom. It is a freedom based on self-interest. (5)

For Hobbes a human being is like a beast, a leviathan that is set in motion by selfish desires and appetites
(photo: omitted)

Guiding questions

1. How does Hobbes understand the human person outside of the constraints of law and authorities?
2. Why, according to Hobbes, do we need a ruler?
3. Explore the meaning of "Everything has a price."

John Locke
(1632-1704)

John Locke is the most quoted philosopher when people seek to articulate the basic principles underlying the liberal democracies. In his writings we find the first stirrings of such deeply held beliefs as government by consent, majority rule, minority rights, moral supremacy of the individual and the sanctity of private property. They are all there in his writings as reflecting the first tentative steps of modern society. John Locke was born in 1632 of a country lawyer father. Both parents died when John was still very young.

Like Hobbes, John Locke studied at Oxford University. He never received his medical degree although he did practise medicine. This was to be his ticket to a comfortable and protected life. He successfully removed an abscess in the chest of the first Earl of Shaftsbury, a Lord of the realm and, from 1672 to his death in 1683, Lord Chancellor of England. Locke, under his grateful sponsorship, was able to experience government from up close. That close relationship also got him into hot water - so much so that as soon as Shaftsbury died Locke found it wise to spend five years in France and Holland. He wrote his most famous works, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Two Treatises of Government*, in 1690 upon his return to England.

Locke's theory of civil government begins with the protection of property. He writes, "He is willing to join in society with others for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name, property." (6) Locke also begins his reasoning by considering a hypothetical state of nature, where persons are equal and are free to act as they will without interference from each other. While Hobbes argued that people in such a state of nature are "nasty and brutish," Locke believed that individuals share in the faculty of reason, and that through reason persons would for the most part act according to the self-evident laws of nature. Each person, then, by nature has the right and responsibility to enforce this natural law. When, in the course of events, reason is left to the side, human behaviour degenerates into conflict. (7)

Furthermore, in this hypothetical state of nature, Locke reasoned that the earth and its riches belong to all people in common. All people being equal, they have equal right to use what they find, so long as they respect each other's physical presence and activities. A person's labour imparts upon the goods of nature property rights to that individual. For example, a field in its natural state belongs to all, but if this field is plowed, by virtue of the person's work added to the field, the field becomes the property of the plower. In this hypothetical state of nature, this can go on as long as there is enough for everybody, for those who have the will and fortitude to work. Individuals are free to pursue their own life, health, liberty and possessions. The theory becomes more complex with the introduction of money, since money makes it possible to store value in excess of what a person could responsibly enjoy in this hypothetical state of nature. While labour remains the ultimate source of all economic value, a monetary system requires agreement among individuals as to the value of money. When there is agreement as to the value of money, property can be valued in monetary terms, and accumulated at will. (8)

John Locke
(image: omitted)

The formation of a civil society requires that all individuals voluntarily surrender their individual right to uphold the natural law in defence of property interests to the community. Locke says that we enter into a "social contract" with one another; we invest powers that we ourselves had into government institutions that declare and enforce fixed rules for conduct, that is, laws, to protect property. (9) It follows, then, that only those who possess property would have a say in the running of civil society.

Locke's notion of freedom is the pursuit of one's own life, liberty and property freed from the "uncertainty as it was in the state of Nature," (10) secured by the "social contract" that we have with one another by virtue of living within society. The reason for government, then, is the protection of private property. Individual liberties are handed over to the government with the understanding that the common good is served when individuals' rights to private property are protected.

Guiding questions

1. What is the relationship between property and the freedom of the individual in Locke's thinking?
2. What was the task of government for Locke? How do people oblige themselves to obey the government?
3. How can people be free and equal with unequal possession of property?

Catholic perspective on private ownership of goods

In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labour, and enjoy their fruits. The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race. However, the earth is divided up among men to assure the security of their lives, endangered by poverty and threatened by violence. The appropriation of property is legitimate for guaranteeing the freedom and dignity of persons and for helping each of them to meet his basic needs and the needs of those in his charge. It should allow for a natural solidarity to develop between men.

The right to private property, acquired by work or received from others by inheritance or gift, does not do away with the original gift of the earth to the whole of mankind. The universal destination of goods remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise.

"In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself." (Gaudium et spes 69#1) The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence, with the task of making it fruitful and communicating its benefits to others, first of all his family.

Goods of production - material or immaterial - such as land, factories, practical or artistic skills, oblige their possessors to employ them in ways that will benefit the greatest number. Those who hold goods for use and consumption should use them with moderation, reserving the better part for guests, for the sick and the poor.

Political authority has the right and duty to regulate the legitimate exercise of the right to ownership for the sake of the common good.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2402 – 2406

(photo: omitted)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a brilliant, unconventional musician, novelist, political and educational thinker, was born in Geneva in 1712. His mother died at his birth and his father, a very difficult man, fled Geneva because of a fight when Jean-Jacques was only ten. His father died shortly thereafter. Rousseau left home at age sixteen to work as a tutor and musician. Only in his forties did he begin his literary career and to write as a political philosopher. In his turbulent life Rousseau never lived long in any one place, generally leaving because of his suspicious and volatile character. He spent the last years of his life in Paris. He died in 1778.

What interests us is how Rousseau tried to connect an individual's freedom with the obligations that come from society.

In 1762 Rousseau produced *The Social Contract*, one of his most influential works on political theory. It begins: "Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains." If by nature, thought Rousseau, as an individual I am self-sufficient and autonomous, why would I accept to be part of a society which would make me dependent and which restricts my liberty? Rousseau, contrary to Hobbes, maintained that human beings were good by nature, and inclined toward compassion for one another. However, within society this natural goodness eventually degenerates into competition of wills with fellow human beings, while at the same time individuals become increasingly interdependent. Rousseau saw this competition and interdependence as threatening both the individual's survival and freedom. However, by coming together through what Rousseau called a "social contract," individuals can both preserve themselves and remain free by submitting to the "general will" of the people. This concept of the "general will" guarantees individuals against being subordinated to the wills of others and also ensures that they obey themselves because they are, collectively, the authors of the law.

Rousseau argued that within this society that is established through "social contract," the people themselves are sovereign, and they themselves should make the laws under which they agree to live. The government is charged with implementing these laws and enforcing the general will of the people. These ideas influenced much of the thinking and actions of the French and American revolutions that overthrew the rule of the monarchy - the Reign of Louis XV in 1789 and King George III in 1776 - and the people themselves laid claim to the right of self-government. But Rousseau also questioned whether the will of the majority of the people in society is always correct. He argued that the goal of government implemented by the people should be to secure freedom, equality, and justice for all within the state, regardless of the will of the majority. When a government fails to act in a moral fashion while upholding the "general will" and the freedom of individuals, it ceases to function properly and loses its authority.

People's participation in society must be consistent with their existence as free and rational human beings. Society is therefore unthinkable without a freedom which expresses humanity's most fundamental attribute. "To give up freedom is to give up one's human quality: to remove freedom from one's will is to remove all morality from one's actions." Moreover, it is with the emergence of society that human beings come into posses-

Jean-Jacques Rousseau
(image: omitted)

sion of their freedom and thus attain the status of moral beings. The institution of any genuine political society must be the result of a social pact, or free association of intelligent human beings who deliberately choose to form the type of society to which they will owe allegiance; this is the only valid basis for a community that wishes to live in accordance with the requirements of human freedom. (11)

Rousseau suggested that the individual would accept society only if society has something to offer that the person could not have as an individual. For Rousseau these benefits were language, property life, freedom. As long as the individual adheres to the order of the general will, society guarantees these rights and freedoms. Hence it is in one's own interest to obey, and it is a government's first duty to protect these rights. Before the law and the constitution everyone is equal, and all citizens are bound to uphold this social contract. A government also was bound to maintain this contract. If it did not, the government should be replaced. For Rousseau, to live in accordance with the general will is a way of "forcing people to be free." (12)

Guiding questions

1. How does Rousseau bring together individual freedom and social obligation?
2. Why did Rousseau think that the power conflicts have their origin in society? How did he try to overcome the competition for power?
3. What is meant by the "social contract"?

Utilitarianism

(photo: omitted)

In modern societies what sort of principles are invoked to justify going after one good rather than another? Let us start with an example. A federal health agency approves an antidepressant drug for children knowing that for a small percentage of children there may be adverse and even serious side effects. In approving such drugs, the agency makes use of what has become known as a utilitarian principle: a product or an action is admissible if it provides "the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people." Utilitarianism measures a good by calculating the happiness or pleasure this good provides to the greater number of people. Utilitarianism claims it is justifiable and right to allow damage to the few if the greater number of people benefit.

According to utilitarianism, the measure of the good is not reason, but whatever maximizes pleasure for the greatest number. The health agency in the example evaluated the antidepressant drug by the happiness it will provide to the greater number of the users. The principle was made popular by British philosopher and economist Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) who said, "An action may be said to be conformable to the principle of utility ... when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it." Bentham used pleasure as an indicator of the usefulness of an action: "How long will the pleasure last? How intense is it? How many aspects of life does it cover? is the pleasure free from

pain or does it entail a little pain? Is the pleasure immediate or does it lie a long way in the future?" (13) Bentham thought you could quantify pleasure and use this as a measure for judging utility. Used as a yardstick it leads to some mistaken conclusions: watching television is a higher good than doing homework; reading a tabloid is better than reading a good newspaper; marijuana should be legalized. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) insisted that the good must be measured not quantitatively but qualitatively. What stimulates the mind is a higher good than what stimulates the body. The happiness of a human is a higher good than the happiness of an animal (hence the admissibility of animal testing).

Utilitarianism is highly popular but filled with danger. A government may decide that for the peace and harmony of a country it is better to jail dissidents; that is, any thought or discussion contrary to the current political regime is criminal. The country will avoid unrest and conflict: the happiness of the majority could justify the painful incarceration of a few. Or again, a program of enforced sterilization in a heavily populated country might be justified by the promise of a higher standard of living. Or, government may order groups or individuals to provide DNA samples and to carry identity cards to protect society against threats of terrorism. One can view the utilitarian approach in the counsel given by the High Priest Caiaphas to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem: "You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11.49). A utilitarian measures an action not on the basis of morality but on a calculation of the benefits of pleasure and deficits of pain. Under the influence of utilitarian thinking, I tell the truth, not because it is intrinsically good to do so, but because experience tells me that in the long run I will have more satisfaction from telling the truth than from lying.

Guiding questions

1. How would you define utilitarianism?
2. Give examples of utilitarian thinking from your experience.
3. Who would be the big losers under a utilitarian ideology? In the long run, how would this affect society?

John Rawls
(1921-2002)

John Rawls
(image: omitted)

liberalism: a philosophy based on the goodness of the human being, autonomy of the individual, and standing for the protection of economic, political and civil rights and freedoms.

John Rawls links the thinking of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau with our time. He was a very influential thinker who was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1921. He served in the Second World War and witnessed the destruction of Hiroshima with the dropping of the atom bomb. This convinced him to leave the army. While studying in Oxford on a Fulbright scholarship he met the liberal political theorist and historian of ideas, Isaiah Berlin, a staunch defender of philosophical liberalism. Berlin's thought inspired Rawls for the rest of his life. Rawls worked at Harvard University for forty years. While there he published his most famous work, *A Theory of Justice* (1972).

With *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls was trying to provide an alternative to utilitarianism, which allows the rights of some people to be sacrificed for the greater benefit of others, as long as the total happiness is increased. Rawls saw this as unacceptable. He struggled to articulate the foundations of the modern state. His political

theory starts with the individual and the individuals freedom. Rawls wondered how to reconcile individual freedom with the constraint of society. Others before him (like Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau) had assumed some type of contract between free individuals and the state. Individuals, to remain free, must consent to give up some of these freedoms in exchange for the security of their property by the state. Rawls realized that individuals will only accept what is just (actually, Rawls says, what is "fair") in this contract. And so he set out to figure out what would be fair.

Imagine a person standing at a door that opens up into society. This person has no idea what awaits him or her on the other side of the door (Rawls called this condition of ignorance the "original position.") Stepping through the door would commit this person to this society's "social contract." But this person has no idea as to what his or her financial position would be, his or her state of health, race or religion, and so on. Before this person steps through the door, what guarantees would he or she expect in terms of rights and freedoms? To address this person's concern, Rawls suggested two principles of justice that govern the society on the other side of that door:

The first principle of justice states that "each person would have the most extensive system of rights and freedoms which can be accorded equally to everyone. These include freedoms of speech, conscience, peaceful assembly, as well as democratic rights.... The first principle is absolute, and may never be violated, even for the sake of the second principle. However, various basic rights may be traded off against each other for the sake of obtaining the largest possible system of rights..." For example, a person's right to privacy could be limited to the degree necessary to ensure security for all members of society. This would include things like criminal background checks for teachers to ensure the security of students.

The second principle of justice states that "economic and social inequalities are justified only if they benefit all of society, especially its most disadvantaged members. Furthermore, all economically and socially privileged positions must be open to all people equally." For example, it is justifiable for a physician to earn more and to be held in greater social esteem than an assembly-line worker or retail service worker. The reason for this is that the physician must undergo years of expensive and intensive education, at considerable personal sacrifice, and in the end is held responsible for life and death decisions. If there were no economic or social compensation, fewer people would undergo the expense and effort of becoming a physician, and society would suffer due to a shortage of physicians. This particular economic and social inequality benefits all of society, and leaves all its members better off. Of course, economic and social inequalities that do not leave all of society's members better off are not justifiable. (14)

(photo: omitted)

In A Theory of Justice Rawls sets forth the proposition that "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the

welfare of society as a whole cannot override. Therefore, in a just society the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests.” In other words, the rights and freedoms of the individual supersede whatever notion of the common good may be discerned by society, and must be protected. (15)

Guiding questions

1. How does Rawls describe the relationship between the individual and society?
2. How do you think Rawls would evaluate the notion of the common good?
3. According to his theory, which health care system would Rawls support: one funded by the government such as in Canada, or a privately owned, for profit, health care system such as in the United States?
4. In a situation of grave danger, such as imminent threat of terrorist attack on a civilian population, would Rawls be in favour of or against the detention and interrogation of innocent members of a community that is suspected of harbouring the terrorist? Explain.

Freedom under challenge

(photo: omitted)

Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Rawls all struggled with the question of human freedom within the political context. What are the rights and freedoms of individuals? Within society where do these rights and freedoms begin and end? Their writings about rights and freedoms uncovered for Western society the ideology of individualism. Liberal democracies and capitalist economies as we experience them today had their beginnings in the seventeenth century. With the discovery of the rights and freedoms of the individual there developed a culture of individualism that was supported by thinkers such as Rawls. At the outset we said that these ideas have had a tremendous positive influence in the development of free societies and democratic principles. They have also had a negative influence. In this section, with the help of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor and the teaching of the Catholic Church, we explore this negative side of individualism in the political context.

Charles Taylor in *The Malaise of Modernity* points out three areas of concern for the status of freedom in modern Western society. Without denying the positive gains created by the freedom of the individual, he signals some detrimental side effects in the exercise of freedom in the West. He captures them under the headings of (1) individualism, (2) instrumental reason and (3) the lessening of freedom in the modern state. Let us look at each in turn.

Individualism

The positive gain to freedom from individualism has been the capacity and the right to choose for ourselves what direction to give to our lives. We are not prevented from deciding what convictions to espouse, what religion to follow, what profession to enter. These are freedoms we need to protect. The search of the authentic self - the underlying ideal of our time - is an ideal to be honoured and appreciated.

(photo: omitted)

Unfortunately, it often has become mired in ideas and theories that reduce the meaning of ethics and morality.

Individualism draws people into themselves. "I'll take care of myself and I expect others to do the same." "I should not be expected to take on the burdens of others as well as my own." This centering on ourselves, according to Taylor, "flattens and narrows our lives, makes our lives poorer in meaning." (16)

With individualism values tend to become relative. We sense that we may not challenge the values of another. We tend to think: "That is their concern, their life choice, and it ought to be respected." (17) We hold this because we believe that everyone has the right to develop what they consider right for themselves. Others have no right to interfere. "My life is for me to determine and others should mind their own business." "I must be true to myself." "I must go along with my feeling, my inclination." There is a real danger that with relativism one will never go beyond a narcissistic self-indulgence.

A deeper moral, ethical discussion of the kind that this program has been proposing is almost out of the question. Ethical conflicts such as on abortion are resolved through legislation and legal procedures. The discussion of what is the better or higher thing to do according to virtue or principles and norms rarely takes place. Legislation tends to formulate new laws on a utilitarian basis. We tend to speak of what we ought to do in terms of "rights" and "freedoms" or procedures. The role of the ethics counsellor for the government or for a corporation is to outline procedures as to how one is to act in particular circumstances. Rarely is there a debate on what might be the over-all ethical aim of a government or a corporation - or of an individual. That discussion, Taylor says, is "off-limits." (18) (Although, to be fair, carefully prescribed procedures can also assure accountability and allow public scrutiny and ethical debate to take place.) We are hesitant to admit reason into the moral debate as if reason is powerless. We demand that governments and individuals remain neutral or impartial in their judgments of values of others. We are not to take sides, wanting to be "politically correct." (Ironically, a "politically correct" position is rarely, if ever, neutral. It is taking a position without taking responsibility for holding that position.) We are not to make a stand on what constitutes the good life. (19)

On all these points the Catholic Church has a very clear position:

"Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings" (CCC #1738). The great fallacy of individualism is that it begins to ask the questions about individual freedom from the assumption that a person begins as an isolated atom that has the choice of when and where to step into relationship, into society. In fact, we all wake up in the midst of community. It is impossible to imagine a person outside of relationship. I cannot name myself without reference to others. The second great commandment, Jesus says, is "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10.25-28). The ideal of personal authenticity and self-fulfillment is honoured, but this authenticity is not focused on oneself to the exclusion of the other. In fact, it is in relationship with others that I have being.

The Church also urges one to see through the confusion of relativism. There are, as we saw in Chapter 8, norms and standards for human action which make certain

actions such as perjury, blasphemy, murder and adultery to be always wrong. (CCC #1755) In other words, some options we choose in life are more important than others. Not everything has the same value. For example, the inviolability of life is higher than the freedom of choice. This is key when considering the many important issues facing our society today, such as stem cell research – using living embryos for the purpose of other people's health. The inviolability of life, present in the embryo, supersedes the value of improving another's health.

The Catholic Church has generally shown a preference for teleological ethics proposed by thinkers such as Aristotle and Aquinas. It places moral questions in the context of the end and purpose of human life. It has a high regard for the power of reason in ethical deliberation. (CCC #1767) Actions are not right because they are chosen but because they are rightfully chosen. In our time we correctly expect these reasons to resonate with what is deepest within us: the Spirit of Truth, the Word of life and love that guides our conscience and our authentic self. Reason does not clash with our search for authenticity. Reason and freedom are not mutually exclusive. They are indispensable partners of ethics and moral living. (20)

Guiding questions

1. What are the positive values of individualism?
2. What are some of the dangers of individualism?
3. How can individualism stifle a person's moral growth?

Instrumental reason: A society of commodities and consumers

(photos: omitted)

When Descartes discovered the self as a thinking self, he achieved this by isolating the act of thinking from its content. The self becomes isolated from its environment. The direct bond with things was lost. What replaced it was instrumental reason. Instrumental reason is our ability to select and develop effective means for arriving at desired ends, whatever they may be. Through instrumental reason, we concern ourselves with how to accomplish something in an effective manner. It is the type of reasoning that drives headlong technological development, without necessarily considering where it is heading. The development of information technology is a good example. Our relationships with one another are more and more mediated by writing, telephone, television, fax, e-mail Internet-based forums, and less by face-to-face conversations and encounters. The space Descartes created between the thinking "I" and reality is now filled with an incredible array of technology. In the terms of Charles Taylor, we live in a society almost totally dominated by instrumental reason. We realize that we can never go back to the pre-technological age.

On the one hand, while instrumental reason increases our capacities in medicine, information, agriculture, high technology, and space research, on the other hand it also creates

dependence and lessens freedom. Let us look at some examples:

Instrumental reason dismisses faith as an illusion. The current fashion in thinking is much more naturalist. (See Chapter 2.) A relationship to God through faith is non-tangible, and therefore whatever goods may be said to result from this relationship are illusory.

There is a great belief and much trust in science and technology. Their influence is such that we tend to rely almost solely on technical solutions. In medicine this has come to mean a great reliance on technology for healing. We have a great trust in the "sciences" of therapy (psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology). For every aspect of life we call in the "experts." It can mean, as Taylor says, that we no longer dare to trust "our own instincts about happiness, fulfillment, and how to bring up our children." (21) The "helping professions" can so dominate our lives that our personal freedom is much diminished.

Through research, development and advanced modes of production, a huge amount of goods has been created, along with the ability of the middle class to purchase these goods. This has resulted in the creation of a consumer society. The consumer society is not just a society that buys many goods; it buys beyond what it needs. The glut of goods purchased in the pre- and post-Christmas period is a good example of such buying beyond our needs. This excess shows another side to the life-style of consumers: the buying of identity.

The buying of identity

Consumer goods are not just goods that we need and use - they have also become symbols. A consumer society attaches symbolic value to the possession and exchange of goods. Goods such as clothing, shoes, cars, jewellery, hair styles, music, beverages are not just possessions but are statements about who I am, what group I identify with, how I am different from others. This may explain the popularity of brand-name buying. Certain brand-names have become symbolic of a status or lifestyle. The preference and popularity of these brands is not determined by quality but by their social capital, that is, the social identity that these brands convey. That so much of our identity has become attached to these material, yet symbolic, goods may explain how insatiable our accumulation of goods has become. Part of that identity is our need to be "with the times." We do not wish to be left behind in the mad rush to buy the latest new gadget. This search for identity through material acquisitions shows the poverty and banality of our possessive culture. (22)

(photos: omitted)

capitalism: an economic system based on private or corporate ownership and control of resources. Goods and services are exchanged in a free market. Capitalism is the economic face of liberal democracy, and also has its roots in the discovery of individualism in the seventeenth century.

Products are made in the factory but brands are created in the mind.

Walter Landor

When people have lost their authentic personal taste, they lose their personality and become instruments of other people's wills.

Robert Graves

How is that we so easily buy into this shallow and often unsatisfactory search for identity? The commodification of all aspects of life - everything has a price - could not have taken place without the power of mass media and the science of advertising. One of the best-known attacks on the power of advertising was made by Vance Packard in his *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957). He recognized the power of advertising to make ordinary consumers into objects that can be manipulated. Advertisers see consumers as bundles of daydreams with hidden yearnings, guilt complexes and irrational emotions. If one is able to reach the unconscious, one could mass-produce consumers in the same way that businesses mass-produced products.

The sociologist C. Wright Mills recognized how carefully designed mass media formulas can tell people who they are, what they should be, how they will succeed, and how their success was measured in material possessions. Driven by the market, one does not look to the deeper human needs and goods. Mills realized how people were becoming increasingly lonely and how the happiness and healing promised by the advertising formulas obscured the real pain and suffering of daily living. The threat of modern consumerism is alienation. One comes to live in such a make-believe world shaped by the constant barrage of media messages that the real world and real, authentic relationships recede into an impossible dream. (23)

Advertising presents itself as providing information and choice. It creates the illusion that the consumer is free and in charge and that it is to his or her needs that the producer is responding. Packard realized that the consumer's need was being created by the advertisers. As the economist Keynes had indicated already in 1935: "The total effect of modern advertising is to shift the preference of consumers in favour of luxury goods rather than necessities, in favour of consumption rather than saving, and in favour of employment rather than leisure." (24) As John Kenneth Galbraith - a Canadian-born economist - wrote in *The New Industrial State*, the corporations were creating new positions in their firms whose task it was to "manage" the demands of consumers. More and more it seems that Max Weber (1864-1920; German sociologist) was right when he said that we are living in an "iron cage," managed by hidden persuaders. As Richard Robbins writes: "In 1880, only \$30 million was invested in advertising in the United States; by 1910, new businesses, such as oil, food, electricity and rubber, were spending \$600 million, or 4 percent of the national income, on advertising. Today that figure has climbed to well over \$120 billion in the United States and to over \$250 billion world-wide." (25) In this context freedom is highly compromised.

(photo: omitted)

Guiding questions

1. What is the meaning of "instrumental reason?"
2. Describe how Canada is a consumer society.
3. How does advertising affect our freedom?

The lessening of freedom in modern societies

(photo: omitted)

Many current social analysts are pessimistic about the chances to recapture freedom in modern society. Authors like Allan Bloom (1930-1992; American professor of social thought and educational critic) in *The Closing of the American Mind* (26) or Robert Bellah (born 1927; American sociologist, educator and social commentator) in *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (27) and others like them have been sounding the alarm bells. They see little hope that modern society can retrieve freedom. They argue that the only freedom left is a freedom of trivial choices within the "iron cage." We have lost, they say, the freedom to dismantle the "iron cage" itself. The "system" and "the market forces" are just too powerful. The bureaucracy of government, the privilege of wealth, the structures of the economy, the power of corporations are so pervasive that individual freedom and our capacity to change them are no match.

Our Christian hope, as we will see in the next chapter, runs counter to these negative powers. Christian hope holds out the expectation of liberation from any powers of oppression. None can withstand the freedom-giving power of God that is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is from this same religious source that Charles Taylor argues for a retrieval of moral sources to set us free. The outlook on political society grounded in individualism, he says, came about at a certain point in history. If it is an historical event, history could have taken - and still can take - another route. It is true that individualism has taken hold of our lives and our imagination, but we can also resist its power. Capitalism, and its current offshoot, neo-liberalism, when left unchecked in the nineteenth century was so cruel to workers that workers rose up and forced governments to institute labour laws and to allow labour unions. The effect that many corporations have had on the environment - leaving society to clean up massive tar ponds and lakes laced with acid, or massive deforestation - led to the ecological movement and the legislation regarding emissions and environmental assessments. There are ways of regaining freedom, to resist the pressures of the "iron cage."

Taylor urges that this retrieval - as we will see in the next chapter - be a retrieval of our Christian heritage. But such a retrieval will not be a going back to a history prior to the changes that came about in the seventeenth century, which we explored at the beginning of this chapter. The discovery of the self as an agent and as an individual must find a place within the retrieval. (28)

The Catholic Church entered the debate on the effect of liberalism and capitalism in the nineteenth century when she began to issue the social encyclicals that have appeared regularly since 1891. The teaching of the Church in matters of social justice is clearly presented in the Catechism. The following is a small sample:

"The social doctrine of the Church developed in the nineteenth century when the Gospel encountered modern industrial society with its new structures for the production of consumer goods, its new concept of society, the state and authority, and its new forms of labour and ownership..." (# 2421)

"Any system in which social relationships are determined entirely by economic factors is contrary to the nature of the human person and his act." (#2423)

"A theory that makes profit the exclusive norm and ultimate end of economic activity is morally unacceptable. The disordered desire for money cannot but

produce perverse effects. It is one of the causes of the many conflicts which disturb the social order. A system that 'subordinates the basic rights of individuals and of groups to the collective organization of production' (Marxism or Communism) is contrary to human dignity. Every practice that reduces persons to nothing more than a means of profit enslaves man, leads to idolizing money and contributes to the spread of atheism. 'You cannot serve God and mammon' (Matthew 6.24)" (#2424)

"The Church has rejected the totalitarian and atheistic ideologies associated in modern times with 'communism' or 'socialism.' She has likewise refused to accept, in the practice of 'capitalism', individualism and the absolute primacy of the law of the marketplace over human labour. Regulating the economy solely by centralized planning (that is, communism) perverts the basis of social bonds; regulating it solely by the law of the marketplace (capitalism) fails social justice, for 'there are many human needs which cannot be satisfied by the market.' (29) Reasonable regulation of the marketplace and economic initiatives, in keeping with a just hierarchy of values and a view to the common good, is to be recommended." (#2425)

Conclusion

We all know that modern society is complex. Politics. Economies. Free Trade. Protectionism. Terrorism. Ethnic cleansing. Free elections. Rigged elections. Peacekeeping. War. We are exposed to these realities in the daily news. Was Hobbes right when he wrote, "humans are wolves toward each other"? Was Locke right when he argued that governments must protect the individuals right to accumulate property? Was Rousseau right in saying that governments must follow the "general will"? Was Rawls right to uphold individual rights as inviolable? Answers to such complex questions are not easily found. What stands out dearly for us is that human freedom has been the central issue in the development of Western civilization. The theories of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Rawls have contributed to our understanding of freedom and the understanding we have inherited has had a social impact on our lives. Charles Taylor helped us to value the freedom that we have, and therefore to be critical of the path that individualism is taking us. The teaching of the Catholic Church and Christian faith guide our discernment of both our freedom and our responsibility to the social fabric of society. Georges Vanier, who held the top governmental post in Canada, is a model for us of one who was able to put into perspective the social and political issues of his time.

(photos: omitted)

Georges Vanier (1881-1967)

Between 1959 and 1967 Georges Vanier was the Governor General of Canada. He was a truly remarkable man who brought a deep faith and spiritual life to this office. Three months after his death, his son Jean Vanier spoke at a National Prayer Breakfast held in the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa. At the beginning of his speech he spoke about his father. It is a touching tribute to the power and freedom which his father derived from his faith.

To begin with, I would like to try and show some of the more secret and rather unknown aspects of his life, and which perhaps give us a key to why he was so loved.

As a man of 79, he remained young - young in heart, young in spirit. He was never old and I would like to try to show where he found the inspiration for his youthfulness, his force and his courage in facing difficult problems.

In reading the books that were beside his bed at the time of his death, and noting the passages that he had lined and underlined and the notes he had made in the margins, I found a clue to some of these qualities. In one of the books the following passage was underlined heavily: "There is no use arguing about it, you are going to be asked to give daily to the combination of these three exercises: prayer, reflection and spiritual reading. No matter how busy you are, no man is too busy to eat; neither is any man too busy to feed his soul. And if we starve our souls, we will deprive our lives, busy though they may be, of their fruitfulness." I think Dad with extraordinary fidelity maintained that attitude throughout his life. You know that at Rideau Hall he installed a chapel where he attended mass every day. But do you know that ever day above that, with strict regularity, he spent half an hour in the chapel, just thinking, and reflecting before his much-loved God. This is where he found his inspiration. He used to remain there even if he had been through difficult periods, even if he was very tired. I remember sometimes going into his room at 10 or 11 o'clock at night after he had had a busy day and he would be sitting in a chair quietly, his hands crossed and with a small sign of his hand he would make me understand that I could come back later because he was having his half-hour rendezvous with his God. (30)

(photo: omitted)

Chapter review

Summary: The modern liberal democratic society replaced a society that was structured around a sacred and cosmic order. The establishment of the liberal democratic society goes back to the same period in history that we now identify as the beginning of modern time: the seventeenth century. For Hobbes, the basis of society is a tacit contract where individuals give up some of their appetite for power in exchange for the security of using their powers without fear of extreme violence. One accepts the obligation to obey a ruler in order to safeguard one's freedom. It is a freedom based on self-interest.

For Locke, the starting point is the protection of property. "He is willing to join in society with others for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name, property." The formation of civil society requires that all individuals voluntarily surrender their individual right to uphold the natural law in defence of property interests to the community.

According to Rousseau, the institution of any genuine political society must be the result of a social pact, or free association of intelligent human beings who deliberately choose to form the type of society to which they will owe allegiance; this is the only valid basis for a community that wishes to live in accordance with the requirements of human freedom.

According to utilitarianism, the measure of the good is not reason, but whatever maximizes pleasure for the greatest number.

Rawls sets forth the proposition that "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. Therefore, in a just society the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests."

With the discovery of the rights and freedoms of the individual there developed a culture of individualism; these ideas have had a tremendous positive influence in the development of free societies and democratic principles. They have also had a negative influence:

Individualism draws people into themselves, making their lives poorer in meaning.

With individualism, values tend to become relative.

With individualism, debate tends to centre on procedures rather than substance.

The Catholic Church has a clear position:

"Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings." (CCC #1738) The great fallacy of individualism is that its starting point is the person in isolation. In fact, persons exist only in relationship.

There is a hierarchy of values. Values are not relative.

Teleological ethics places moral questions in the context of the end and purpose of human life.

While instrumental reason increases our capacities in things like medicine and technology, it also creates dependence and lessens freedom.

Many current social analysts argue that the bureaucracy of government, the privilege of wealth, the structures of the economy, the power of corporations are so pervasive that individual freedom and our capacity to change them are no match.

Christian hope holds out the expectation of liberation from any powers of oppression. None can withstand the freedom-giving power of God that is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is from this same religious source that Charles Taylor argues for a retrieval of moral sources to set us free.

Review questions; Knowledge and understanding

1. Describe the key ideas pertaining to the individual and freedom in society as developed by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Rawls.
2. Explain how the Catholic Church views the positive and negative influences of individualism on society.

Thinking and inquiry

3. Analyze the threats to human freedom in today's society.
4. Charles Taylor urges the retrieval of human freedom through a retrieval of our Christian heritage. Explain.

Communication

5. Write a five-paragraph essay critiquing utilitarianism as a basis for government.
6. Folk music has a great tradition of songs about freedom in society. Collect and present songs about freedom in society, and provide an analysis. Or, write your own song or poem about freedom in society.

Application

7. You have reached, or are close to reaching, voting age. Find out how to register to vote. Become informed as to elections taking place. What are the issues? What do they have to do with what you have been studying in this chapter?
8. Research the policies of the various political parties. Where to do they stand with regard to the protection of human freedom and dignity? Do their policies indicate a utilitarian approach to our life together in society? How can you influence political party policies?

Glossary

capitalism: An economic system based on private or corporate ownership and control of resources and means of production and distribution. Goods and services are exchanged in a free market.

commodity: Something that carries an economic value within the marketplace; something that can be bought, sold and traded.

consumerism: A world view whereby one attributes meaningfulness to life through one's capacity and ability to purchase and consume economic goods.

democracy: Government by the will of all the people, a will that is expressed directly or through freely elected representation. To protect all people within the society from tyranny of the majority, democracies must recognize and guarantee the rights of the minority. A democracy that is ruled strictly by majority without protecting the rights of the minority would quickly degenerate into a system of class or privilege that no longer reflects the will of the governed.

individualism: A world view that favours the free action of individuals within society; a philosophical stance that began to develop in the seventeenth century with the thinking of Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, that places personal rights and freedoms above other considerations. A social theory that favours personal autonomy.

instrumental reason: Human ability to select and develop effective means for achieving desired ends; ability to develop technologies.

liberalism: A philosophy based on the goodness of the human being, autonomy of the individual, and standing for the protection of economic, political and civil rights and freedoms.

market: Where buyers and sellers meet to exchange, sell, trade goods. The value of goods is determined in the market, largely as a factor of supply and demand. However, the market is rarely allowed to function in an entirely free manner when one takes into consideration government restrictions, duties and tariffs, collusion among suppliers to limit supply in order to drive up the price, fierce advertising practices, and so on.

private property: Something that is owned for one's exclusive use, or for one's exclusive control.

relativism: A doctrine that knowledge is not absolute, but is conditioned by relation to another. Everything stands in relationship to everything else, and is judged based on these relationships rather than on any absolute principle or truth.

social contract: A term used by philosophers to describe the tacit agreement of individuals to live in community. It is a means of discussing in hypothetical terms the conditions that govern human society.

utilitarianism: A philosophy or world view that measures the value of all things according to the principle of usefulness - that which provides for the greatest pleasure or well being for the greatest number.

Chapter 12

The freedom of the children of God

My strength and my failing are you.
 My inheritance and my poverty,
 My war and my peace,
 The judge of my poor tears,
 The cause of my hope.
 Pedro Casaldaliga, *The Mysticism of Liberation*

Focus your learning

Cognitive; Explain St. Paul's concept of freedom as described in his letter to the Romans, Chapter 8.

Practical; Describe the role of grace in moral living.

Affective; Explain how living a moral life is an act of thanksgiving to God for the gifts of mercy and love.

Key terms In this chapter

conversion; freedom; grace; legalism; Pelagianism; righteous; truth

Key thinkers

St. Paul

For freedom Christ has set us free

Freedom goes by many names: liberation, salvation, deliverance, redemption, reconciliation, and righteousness. Each of these in its own way says freedom. Faith adds a new layer to what we mean by freedom. In contrast to the individual freedom that underlies so much of our culture, Christian freedom is relational. It is grounded in our relationship with God or - more accurately – God's relationship with us. We have said in previous chapters that this God-relationship is the most important aspect of our identity. In this chapter we propose that it is also the highest expression of our freedom.

Ben Shaw story

A few years ago, I lay desperately ill on a motel floor in a southern city. I learned later that within a few hours, if left unattended, I would have gone into alcoholic convulsions and might have died. At that point in time I did not know I was an alcoholic.

I crawled to the telephone, but was shaking and quivering so badly that I could not dial. Finally, I managed one digit and got the operator. "Please help me," I pleaded. "Call Alcoholics Anonymous." She took my name and address. Within ten minutes a man walked in the door. I had never seen him before, and he had no idea who I was. But he had the breath of the Father on his face and an immense reverence for my life. He scooped me up in his arms and raced me to a detox centre. There began the agony of withdrawal. Anyone who has been down both sides of the street can tell you that withdrawal from alcohol can be no less severe than withdrawal from heroin.

To avoid bursting into tears, I will spare the reader that odyssey of shame and pain, unbearable guilt, remorse, and humiliation. But the stranger brought me back to life. His words might sound corny to you, like tired old clichés. But they were words of life to me. This fallen-away Catholic, who had not been to the Eucharistic

table in years, told me that the Father loved me, that he had not abandoned me, that he would draw good from what had happened. He told me that right now the name of the game wasn't guilt and fear and shame but survival. He told me to forget about what I had lost and focus on what I had left.

Later I learned that my benefactor was an itinerant labourer who showed up daily at Manpower, a local employment agency. He put cardboard in his work shoes to cover the holes. Yet, when I was able to eat, he bought me my first dinner at McDonalds. For seven days and seven nights, he breathed life into me physically and spiritually and asked nothing in return.

Later I learned that he had lost his family and fortune through drinking. In his loneliness he turns on his little TV at midnight and talks to John Wayne, hoping he will talk back. Every night before bed he spends fifteen minutes reading a meditation book, praises God for his mercy, thanks him for what he has left, prays for all alcoholics, then goes to his window, raises the shade, and blesses the world.

Two years later I returned to the same southern city. My friend still lived there but I had no address or telephone number. So I called A.A. In one of life's tragic ironies, I learned that he was on Skid Row.... As I drove through Skid Row, I spotted a man in a doorway whom I thought was my friend. He wasn't. Just another wino who was neither sober nor drunk. Just dry. He hadn't had a drink in twenty-four hours, and his hands trembled violently. He reached out and asked, "Hey man, can you gimme a dollar to get some wine?" I knelt down before him and took his hands in mine. I looked into his eyes. They filled with tears. I leaned over and kissed his hands. He began to cry. He didn't want a dollar. He wanted what I had wanted two years earlier lying on the motel floor - to be accepted in his brokenness, to be affirmed in his worthlessness, to be loved in his loneliness. He wanted to be relieved of what Mother Teresa of Calcutta, with her vast personal experience of human misery, says is the worst suffering of all - the feeling of not being accepted or wanted.

I never located my friend that day. But several days later I was celebrating Eucharist for a group of recovering alcoholics. Midway through the homily, my friend walked in the door. My heart skipped. But he disappeared during the distribution of communion and did not return.

Two days later, I received a letter from him which read in part: "Two nights ago in my own clumsy way I prayed for the right to belong, just to belong among you at the holy Mass of Jesus. You will never know what you did for me last week on Skid Row. You didn't see me, but I saw you. I was standing just a few feet away in a storefront window. When I saw you kneel down and kiss that wino's hands, you wiped away from my eyes the blank stare of the breathing dead. When I saw that you really cared, my heart began to grow wings, small wings, feeble wings, but wings. I threw my bottle of wine down the sewer. Your tenderness and understanding breathed life into me, and I want you to know that. You released me from my shadow world of panic, fear, and self-hatred. God, what a lonely prison I was living in. Father Brennan, if you should ever wonder who Ben Shaw is, remember I am someone you know very well. I am every man you meet and every woman you meet... Am I also you?"

His letter ends, "Wherever I go, sober by the grace of God one day at a time, I will thank God for you."
Brennan Manning (1)

(photo: omitted)

Guiding questions

1. What brought Father Manning back to freedom?
2. What sort of freedom is it? Give traits of this freedom.

St. Paul's understanding of freedom

Father Brennan Manning's story is a paradoxical story of freedom. Out of the depths of addiction comes freedom - a freedom unleashed by love, by another. Father Manning's story is one that has been told throughout Christianity. It reflects what St. Paul learned from his conversion to Christ and what Christianity has reflected on for 2000 years: a new experience of freedom. It says that my highest freedom is not first of all a solitary achievement. Freedom does not start with me. It is a gift. St. Paul helped us to see the mystery of this gift. For him the gift of freedom implied two things. On the one hand it was a freedom from something; on the other hand it was a freedom for something. The freedom from, he called by many names: law, death, sin, life according to the flesh, slavery.

As to the freedom for, St Paul has a lot to say about what he has been set free for. His conversion is all about a new freedom that arises from his encounter with Christ. And in this new freedom he looks back at his previous life and sees how unfree he had been. Christ is the pivotal point for Paul's understanding of freedom. He experiences his new freedom as a freedom for fullness of life in Christ. To have Christ becomes his greatest hope. In Christ he knows himself to be free. To demonstrate this we look at his Letter to the Romans, Chapter 8.

Paul's Letter to the Romans: Chapter 8

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law - indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

For Paul a dramatic historical change has taken place in the world because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus: God sent his own Son (Jesus) to engage the areas in which people experience a lack of freedom. By sending Jesus into the world God shows a desire to make things right. God enters into the fray of human life to set us free. We see God's power and love in Jesus.

Those who believe in what God did in Jesus are - in Paul's words - "in Christ Jesus." They are set free, or set right. Whatever was enslaving them has lost its hold on them. What has taken its place is the Spirit of Jesus: the Holy Spirit.

"Flesh" means the human person in his or her weakness and loss of freedom.

"Spirit" means the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and acting in us. It is the Spirit who tackles in us and with us the powers of slavery. The Spirit makes our bodies - us - fully alive. It is the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. Hence, the Spirit is the Spirit of freedom.

Paul's Letter to the Romans: Chapter 8 (continued)

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh - for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ - if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation awaits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

So if the Spirit leads us in life, we are children of God and enjoy the freedom of God. We are no longer slaves but we are adopted into the very life of God. The Spirit gives us a share in the life of Christ. He gives us freedom to pray and the freedom to inherit whatever Christ accomplished. At this point nothing controls us any longer except our faith and trust in God's action in us.

The Spirit's action in us will help to overcome our distrust, fear and inability to go beyond our ego.

Paul says, this freedom for which Christ died is what all of creation has thirsted for. If we are free then creation will also be free. If we are free, creation will not suffer the ravages of our greed and our lack of freedom. All creation groans for this to happen. We can't see this yet. But it is here as hope. This hope in us we wait patiently to see fulfilled.

For Paul this freedom is not yet complete in the present - its fullness is yet to come.

What then do we make of our present experience where suffering and death still have their power? Paul finds in the death and resurrection of Jesus an expression of God's desire for people. The same power with which Jesus rose from the dead is now operative in our lives. In faith and in hope we call upon this power. The Spirit helps us in our weakness and allows us to live in hope.

The Spirit is presented as an advocate or defender who pleads our cause to God. We are not left to our own resources. We have one who takes up our cause.

Paul's Letter to the Romans: Chapter 8 (continued)

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The love of God for us is the ultimate basis for our confidence in life. God is a God who is for us, not against us.

On the front gable of the basilica of St. Paul's-outside-the-walls in Rome, Christ is flanked by St. Peter and St. Paul. According to tradition, St. Paul was beheaded and buried at the site of the basilica.

(photo: omitted)

Guiding questions

1. What is it according to Paul that has changed the human situation?
2. How does Paul propose that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit changes the reality of freedom?

God's initiative in our freedom

As we saw in Chapter 6, Paul was a strict Shammaite Pharisee. He was convinced that the keeping of Torah was at the core of Jewish identity. Keeping Torah was also seen as a guarantee of freedom. It was God's instruction and guidance. Keeping the law was the way for things to be right with God. It was because Saul (Paul's name before his conversion to Christ) saw Jesus' followers turning away from the law and towards Jesus that he considered them a serious threat to Israel. Saul thought that the law must be kept at all costs, and that Jesus and his followers were only leading the people astray. When Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, he discovered something that radically changed his view of life. What set him right with God was not the law, the Torah, but God revealed in Jesus. It was nothing Paul did that set him free. It was God's doing. This had far-reaching repercussions for Paul's view of life.

1. Freedom from the law

At first Paul did not draw too many conclusions from the fact that it was not the Torah but faith in Christ that set him free. But by the time he wrote the Letter to the Romans and the Letter to the Galatians, he did - to the consternation of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. In these letters he began to insist that since it was not the keeping of the Torah that led him to Christ, the Romans and the Galatians did not have to keep Torah. It was quite a shock for those Jewish Christians who wanted to retain the Jewish piety towards the Torah together with their faith in Christ. For Paul, the observance of the law could not be made obligatory to non-Jews. To the Romans and Galatians he preached therefore a freedom from the law. When some of the Galatians are persuaded to return to the keeping of Torah and circumcision, Paul responds vehemently: "You foolish Galatians! Who has

bewitched you? ... Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? ... Did you experience so much for nothing?" (3.1-4)

What to do then with all the do's and don'ts of the law? The Torah contained 613 precepts (248 positive and 365 negative). For the Jews and for Saul these had been the lifeline for fidelity to God's covenant. Is St. Paul now pushing these aside as worthless, as unable to set free? Was not the Torah God's guidance? Was this guidance really ineffectual for a good life? Was there to be no morality at all to these questions Paul is quite clear. It was not the law that made people free. Even before Moses and the Torah, Abraham and Sarah were righteous before God. It was not the law that made them free; it was their faith. Even more so now, St. Paul argues. It is not the Torah but obedient faith in Jesus Christ that sets things right.

The Galatians lived in what today is central Turkey. By the time Paul preached in Galatia, he had become convinced that these non-Jewish people needed only to convert to the gospel of Christ. He could see no reason for them to become Jewish and take on the whole Law of Moses as well.

The Roman community that St. Paul addressed was made up of two major groups: Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. In his letter, Paul tries to encourage each group to respect the other. Jewish and Gentile Christians were different, but there didn't need to be deep divisions between them. One group had centuries of tradition and the memory of the prophets, but the other was a new example of the creative power of God's love.

2. "The freedom we have in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 2.4)

Of his conversion experience St. Paul says, "God ... was pleased to reveal his Son to me." (Galatians 1.15-16) As we saw in Chapter 6, Saul became Paul because he had an experience of Jesus that overturned his life. He says that Jesus appeared to him. He saw Jesus as the glory of God. The significance of this experience for him was huge. It suddenly hit him that with Jesus, God had entered the fray of human existence in person. In a beautiful hymn which biblical scholars say goes back to within the first decade after the death of Jesus, this is expressed as follows:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born of human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.
(Philippians 2.5-11)

For Paul, Jesus was now the Lord of life. He was not a lord who dominated and controlled people. He is the Lord who humbled himself, the God who emptied himself. As the humble and emptied-out God, Jesus showed what an "exalted," a God-like life, is all about. It is a life of faith - here called obedience, the attentive listening to God. For Paul, Christ revealed that the origin of life and freedom lay in God's self-emptying love. God did not hesitate to empty himself to take on our existence of "slavery," even if it meant dying. As we read in Romans 8.3: "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." What is needed then, according to Paul, is not the law, but faith: faith in the love of God. After all, it is God who set us free. We must jealously guard this freedom. But this is not yet the full story of our freedom.

3. The indwelling Spirit

This freedom is primarily and exclusively due to the action of the Spirit. St. Paul writes, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead

dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you" (Romans 8.11). We are not "free" in word only. We are made free in our very being by the Holy Spirit. Again it is not the law or anything that we might have done. The freedom is a work of the Spirit in us and with us. Hence, it is fully a gifted freedom, a freedom set free from anything outside of us. The Spirit works only with our freedom - to make us free. This is the whole task of our spiritual life: to become free with the freedom of God. That is why our groaning in life to be released from our addictions, our slaveries, is really the groaning of the Holy Spirit in us. Our desire for freedom is the Spirit's desire in us that we be free.

4. What to do then with the laws, precepts, moral norms, rules and principles?

Paul explains that the Law of Moses functioned as a teacher - identifying what was sinful, and revealing the truth about what God demanded - but basically the law was powerless. It did not give the people the power to be righteous. In part, the law taught the various behaviours that could separate people from one another and from God. Paul had realized that it was not the Mosaic Law that made us right before God, but faith. The faith of Abraham prepared us for faith in Jesus Christ who is himself the power of God. Jesus frees us from sin, saves us from destruction, and empowers us with his Spirit, giving us the fullness of life and love.

Jesus himself said that he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5.17). This means that in Christ, God has taken the initiative and given us the gift of salvation. He has acted to justify us to make us righteous. He is the divine life poured into our humanity to make us right before God. All of this is gift; that is to say, God's grace. In other words, we do not earn God's love and eternal life by moral living. Rather, God gives us his life, his love, and everlasting happiness simply because God loves us. Moral living - living in right relationship with one another and with God - is the way we offer our thanksgiving to God for the gifts of mercy and grace. To live according to the gift of God's grace is to be in love with God, with self and with others in this world. The law of love fulfills the Mosaic Law.

Put differently, all the laws and commandments and our striving for the good are powerless without God's grace living within us. But with God's grace we have the power of God within our hearts and souls to live ethical lives. The love of God calls us to union with him and one another forever. All the principles and laws presented in the previous chapters of this text must be approached out of the love given to us by God in Christ. Moral living, the ethical life and search for the good, must flow freely from God's love abiding in our hearts and souls – a love which we discover is simply a grace, a gift.

For St. Paul the Mosaic Law could never make us right with God because only God could make us right. And God did this by sending us his Son, Jesus. St. Paul discovered, and to this day invites us to discover, that moral living is not performed merely out of obligation, but out of the freedom of Christ Jesus, our brother, whose life we share, whose power to love infinitely abides in us as a grace, a gift.

The illustration above shows a painting from the Middle Ages in which St. Paul is witnessing to his faith in Christ. (image: omitted)

Faith refers to a right relationship with God. It is a relationship of trust that God loves humanity and desires totally that it be. Nothing can come between us and God except sin.

Guiding questions

1. Describe Paul's experience of freedom in Christ.
2. What does Paul mean by freedom from the law or freedom from sin?
3. How does Paul's experience of freedom affect our understanding of morality?

Pelagianism

Our freedom does not come from our efforts to be free. This truth does not sit well in our culture. In fact, it did not sit well with many people as early as the fifth century. A very pious and ascetical man named Pelagius, a spiritual leader from the Roman aristocracy, proposed a teaching about human freedom that in the end the Church had to reject. His theory was so popular that many churches in the East and the West supported it. Even popes were hesitant to say anything against him. Up to that point no one had seriously considered the point that Pelagius was making.

Pelagius maintained that God gives everyone an equal chance in life. All of us have to decide about our lives, and we are able to do so. For Pelagius, this meant that we must make the first move in our spiritual life. He did not recognize or accept that the first move comes from God. For him, God assists us with grace, but we have to initiate our conversion to God. The beginning and end of our life is our responsibility. In the year 530 Pope Boniface II condemned this position. Why? Because it does not recognize or honour God's initiative and God's grace. If Pelagius were correct, our ultimate happiness would be due to our efforts - our good works - and not due to God's graciousness. But God's free gift of grace far exceeds what we can accomplish with our works. It was to safeguard what Paul taught - that we were set right not by keeping the law, but by faith in Christ - that the Church condemned the teaching of Pelagius. We need only respond with trust and love and hope to Christ's gift of himself.

In the year 530 Pope Boniface II (pictured above) condemned the teaching of Pelagius.
(image: omitted)

Guiding questions

1. Why is the position of Pelagius unacceptable for Christians?
2. How is the indwelling Spirit the source of our freedom?
5. Legalism or literalism

Thomas Aquinas understood legalism or literalism to mean "each law which imposes itself on humans from without. This includes even the prescriptions of the Gospel." (II-IIae, q. 106, art. 1 and 2) Legalism, theologian Timothy O'Connell says, is a counterfeit approach to morality. It asserts that what is central to morality is blind obedience to the law. It leads to the attitude that if someone in authority commands something or if the law says it is legal, it is therefore also moral. There are clear situations today where what is legal in some countries is not moral - capital punishment, abortion, racial profiling, active euthanasia being good examples. Philosophers of law have long argued whether something is right because it is commanded, or whether something is commanded because it is right. St. Thomas Aquinas and Catholic tradition have maintained the latter. Obedience is never to be blind, because the hallmark of human dignity is intelligence and freedom. Legalism is a moral approach which does not give reasons. Like any "ism," it excludes any other considerations about what is true and real. Thus legalism excludes any consideration of faith or truth or reason other than the law. Ethical and moral value does not come from mere obedience, but from something being right or wrong. (3)

We find this same teaching of Paul concerning the freedom of the Christian already foreshadowed in the writings of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jeremiah speaks of a law not written on stone tablets - imposed from outside - but written on human hearts. He

speaks of a time when this inner law will be given. When this will happen, he promises, everyone will know God (Jeremiah 31.31-34). Ezekiel talks about a new heart that God will place in people at the time of their liberation from exile: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you" (36.26). God wants us to have an internal law: the word and truth that came to us in Christ. With Christ, God instructs us from within. It is God's Spirit who keeps Christ's word and truth alive in us. As we read in John: "The Holy Spirit ... will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (14.26). What God desires from each one of us is our heart. Our heart has been given to us so that we can give it back. Through the indwelling of the Spirit in us we have become sons and daughters of God. We are no longer strangers; we are children of God. That is our freedom. We act out of this conviction, out of this love. Only love gives the full guarantee of our freedom. It is no wonder that Aquinas concluded from this that laws imposed from the outside are only for those who are not free. For those who are free, the law comes from within. (4)

Guiding questions

1. What is meant by legalism? Give some examples from your own experience.
2. What do the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel mean by a law written on the heart?
3. What would be an appropriate Christian attitude toward obeying laws?
6. "The Truth will set you free" John 8.32

The grace of God that is connected to the experience of conversion and to the new freedom that it brings is also connected to the truth. We cannot experience conversion or the freedom it brings truly to be ourselves unless we confront the truth about ourselves first. The Gospel of St. John, which was written approximately twenty or thirty years after Paul's letter to the Romans, has much to say about understanding the grace of truth.

In the book *Dead Man Walking* and the movie based on the book, a convicted murderer/rapist mocks the effort of the prison pastoral worker, Sister Helen Prejean, who tries to discuss his pending execution and the importance of preparing for death and facing God. The murderer laughingly tells her that he knows Jesus will save him because he believes in Jesus. That is what he was taught by his mother. Sister Helen Prejean directly challenges him. She argues that he does not know Jesus because Jesus is the Truth. If he knew Jesus he would admit the truth about himself - that he was a rapist and murderer. Then, argues Sister Helen, he would be free to ask the victim's family for forgiveness. Sister Helen was showing him how the grace of God moves us towards the truth and how the truth will set us free.

Before he dies, he confesses the truth and asks the family and God to forgive him. He has repented. His conversion, like all experiences of real freedom, was based on the truth about himself and others. He could no longer point the finger of blame at anyone except himself. He had been the agent of violation and death. This was the truth about himself. But to make things right, he had to accept the truth. He was accountable for what he had done; no one else.

There was another man 2000 years ago who tried to get at the truth and save an innocent man. But when the weight of political correctness was threatening his own safety and security he decided to wash his hands of the decision to have this innocent man executed. This man, of course, was Pontius Pilate. After questioning Jesus and finding no crime, after offering the crowd another convict for execution, and after accepting Jesus' answer that he would have no authority if it had not been given from above (John 18.11), he washed his hands of an innocent man. In order to be politically correct, he failed to defend the truth. There is irony in the way John depicts the encounter between Pontius Pilate and Jesus. Jesus, the man whom his followers knew to be "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14.6) is questioned by Pilate:

Pilate asked him, "So you are a King?"

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"
(John 18.37-38)

The Truth was an accused man who was innocent, Jesus, standing in front of Pilate; Pilate chose to ignore the truth, to give in to the pressure to be politically correct and to save his own position.

For the murderer/rapist in *Dead Man Walking*, Sister Helen Prejean helped him to see the truth. The Truth dwelt in his heart. When he recognized the truth he chose to accept it. He wept and no doubt his encounter with the truth brought him freedom and new life.

Grace

Grace - the gift of God's love at the centre of our existence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit - touches the heart of Christian life. Here are three pivotal statements from the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

1972: "The New Law is called a law of love because it makes us act out of the love infused by the Holy Spirit, rather than from fear; a law of grace, because it confers the strength of grace to act, by means of faith and the sacraments; a law of freedom, because it sets us free from the ritual and juridical observances of the Old Law, inclines us to act spontaneously by the prompting of charity and, finally, lets us pass from the condition of servant who 'does not know what his master is doing' to that of a friend of Christ."

1999: "The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. It is the sanctifying or deifying grace received in Baptism. It is in us the source of the work of sanctification."

2022: "The divine initiative in the work of grace precedes, prepares, and elicits the free response of man. Grace responds to the deepest yearnings of human freedom, calls freedom to cooperate with it, and perfects freedom."

Through his own baptism, Jesus heralds the sanctifying nature of the sacrament. The illustration above shows the baptism of Jesus as depicted a fifth-century baptistry in Ravenna. Jesus is surrounded by John the Baptist (right), the human form of the River Jordan and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove.
(image: omitted)

The bishop's candlesticks

A touching example of the freedom of the children of God is given by Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables*. Here is the story of the bishop's candlesticks in an abridged version:

Les Misérables tells the story of Jean Valjean, a man who had been imprisoned for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sister's hungry family. Bitter and resentful, Jean never accepted the sentence. Repeatedly he tried to escape. Consequently, his jail term for stealing a loaf of bread lasted nineteen years. Finally released and burdened with the stigma of being a convict, Jean wandered through France. Cold and hungry already rejected by a number of innkeepers in the town of Digne, he finally knocked on the door of the bishop. He is welcomed in, served a meal at the bishop's table with costly wine, and offered a bed with dean sheets for the night. The bishop's kindness knew no limits. For the first time in nineteen years Jean felt that he was treated as a

human being. Having fallen asleep for the first time in a bed with dean sheets, Jean woke up with the church bells ringing at two in the morning. Obsessed by the silver cutlery of the meal, he could not get back to sleep. Finally, tossing and turning for an hour and a half, he went into the bishop's bedroom, stole the silver cutlery from his cupboard and escaped into the night.

The next morning three gendarmes appeared at the door of the bishop holding Jean Valjean by his arms and neck. Before the gendarmes could say anything, the bishop walks toward Jean and cries, "So here you are! I'm delighted to see you. Had you forgotten that I gave you the candlesticks as well? They're silver like the rest... Did you forget to take them?" Jean's eyes widened. He stared at the bishop with an expression no words can convey. Hearing the response of the bishop, the gendarmes let Jean go. When they left, Jean was left alone with the bishop. He seemed to be on the verge of collapse. The bishop said to him in a low voice: "Do not forget, do not ever forget, that you have promised me to use the money to make yourself an honest man." Then he added solemnly: "Jean Valjean, my brother, you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you. I am withdrawing it from dark thoughts and from the spirit of perdition, and I am giving it to God!"

Because Jean Valjean accepted the bishop's gift, his life became an act of love. He devoted himself to raising Cosette, the orphaned child of a prostitute. Later he faced danger to save the man who loved Cosette, knowing that this man would eventually take Cosette away with him, leaving Valjean to face his remaining years alone.

Opposed to Jean Valjean is a man committed to the law. Javert, convinced of his own righteousness, becomes obsessed with seeking to recapture Jean Valjean. Javert is so duty-bound that he becomes blind to goodness. In the end it is Valjean, the convict, who learns the lesson of love. He comes to see what is expressed so beautifully in the musical *Les Misérables*: "To love another person is to see the face of God." (5)

Guiding questions

1. How is the bishop a witness of grace?
2. What brought Valjean back to life?

The rich young man (Mark 10.17-22)

The gospels tell a powerful story about a rich person who encounters the goodness of Jesus and wants to enter the depths of this goodness, until he runs into an obstacle. He comes to Jesus looking for an answer to a moral question, but receives much more.

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Following this story, Jesus looks around and in sadness says to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" (v.23) Why is it so hard? Why is it so bad to have the security of wealth so that you don't have to worry about money? In the story of the rich man it becomes clear. It is above all a story about goodness. That's how it starts off. The man calls Jesus "good Teacher." Jesus asks him why he calls him

good. Goodness is the trademark of God. If you seek to find the good, search for it in God. God alone is good in the full sense of the term. Then Jesus recounts all the ways that we share in this goodness. Be good to your neighbour in the way the commandments point out to us. When the man says that he has kept these all his life, the account says, "Jesus, looking at him, loved him." But the goodness of God has more ways of showing itself than in the keeping of the commandments. Jesus does not say to him, "Congratulations. You already have the fullness of life. Go home and keep it up." Goodness - God's goodness - does not end at some "enough" point. Goodness never ends. And so Jesus turns to the young man and says, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

Jesus challenged the rich young man's ego about being a good person. He also challenged his attachment to material possessions. The man "went away grieving." His search for the good had found a stumbling block, and the stumbling block was himself! His attachment to wealth got in the way of living a fuller life. Jesus did not condemn him. He felt sad for him. In the final analysis, the man was unable to imagine that there could be something more valuable than his wealth. His wealth kept him captive. It kept him from following Jesus.

Guiding questions

1. What are some of the obstacles to your freedom that this story reveals?
2. What is your security? What could you not do without?
3. What encourages you to follow Christ, or prevents you from following Christ?

Grace: God's gift

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit or the mission of the Holy Spirit to guide us in love has traditionally been called grace. Grace is, in other words, the love with which God loves us. And since this love is God himself, we say that grace is the Holy Spirit in us. Grace is the participation in the inner life of God. That is why tradition has called us children of God or adopted sons and daughters. Jesus is "the only Son" and we are the adopted sons and daughters through the action of the Spirit in us. The Eastern Church has called grace divinisation or deification. Grace is the fire of God's love in us. The Spirit makes this fire of love to become our love: the love with which we love.

Grace is the gift of the Holy Spirit that makes us gracious and right before God. The Spirit's gift of love is not a thing, but is rather God's very life - his Son - dwelling in us! God and people are not competitors. The most perfect image of grace is the Son of God becoming human in Jesus of Nazareth. His humanity was the gift of God - the incarnation of God's love or grace. In his life and actions we witness the noblest of human beings. In the same way this happens to us when we are baptized into Christ. We are given a share in Christ's own life, not as something attached to us from the outside but from within. Christ is the very source of our life. We become more intensely human, free and capable to love.

During the Easter Vigil, the Paschal Candle (symbol of Christ, the light of the world) is plunged into the water which will be used for baptism, reminding us that we share in the life of Christ through our baptism.

(photo: omitted)

Gertrude the Great (1256-1302)

We know very little about Gertrude. We do not know her last name or the place where she was born. Her mother died when she was only five years old. Gertrude had no memory of ever being held in her mother's arms. She was brought to a monastery of Benedictine sisters in Helfta, in what is now Germany. It became her home. She lived there for the rest of her life. We learn little about her even in her writings. As a child she was - according to herself - serious, lovable, always wanting to please. As an adult she says she was temperamental and difficult to live with. But she was a gifted woman. She studied first the classical curriculum of the time, the seven fine arts and sciences, and later theology. She studied all the books of the Bible and could quote scripture for every occasion. But these studies did not satisfy her heart. Near the end of her studies, she went through a terrible crisis. She says, "It began in the period of Advent ... the year I completed my 25th year. I entered a period of confusion, in which my heart became so distraught, that all my youthful exuberance became distasteful... At the same time you (she refers to Christ) began from that time onward to act in me in a wondrous and mysterious manner."

In 1281 Gertrude sees Jesus for the first time as a beautiful young man. The Lord tells her, "I will save you; do not be afraid!" From that time until the end of her life Gertrude had an incredible experience of the nearness of her Lord. This proximity of Jesus and her trust that he would save her took away all her fear and allowed her to take up all burdens and misery. Gertrude was frequently seriously ill. She speaks of sleeplessness and of feelings of complete loneliness and abandonment. But in such moments Gertrude "fled to the Lord, as she was accustomed." Slowly she was transformed into someone who was faithful even in her suffering. She was deeply attached to Christ, born out of a love for her Lord. The Lord became her "only true friend." (6)

Gertrude was someone who deeply lived out of the love that God had for her. In a prayer she gave a glimpse of her deepest self: "Woe, woe is me! How long will my exile last?.. When, oh when will you show yourself to me, so that I may see you and draw from you, my God, you source of my life? Then I shall drink, and I shall be drunk from the abundance of sweetness of this living well.. You source of eternal light, bring me home, back to you, where I came from, you deepest source of all that is. So that I may know as I am known, so that I may love as I am loved. I shall see you, you my God, as you are. I shall see you and be full of joy and possess you and through you be happy for ever. Amen." Gertrude's life is not filled with memorable deeds. We only know her from her writings. Yet she was a lover, someone who despite her suffering knew herself to be in a most intimate love of Christ and make her suffering fruitful: "If someone in suffering still has so much power to raise her spirit in praise and thanksgiving to God, then she can add in full joy: 'And as a bride he has crowned me with a garland.'" She truly deserves to be known as "the Great." (7)

Gertrude the Great
(image: omitted)

Reflections on grace

John 15.4-7 'Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, as), for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.'

(photo: omitted)

St. Paul: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:8)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Grace is a participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ, the Head of his Body. As an "adopted son" he can henceforth call God "Father," in union with the only Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church. (#1997)

Thomas Merton: Grace is not a strange, magic substance which is subtly filtered into our souls to act as a kind of spiritual penicillin. Grace is unity, oneness within ourselves, oneness with God. (8)

St. Thomas Aquinas: Grace is nothing else but a certain beginning of glory in us. Grace renders us like God and a partaker of the divine nature. (9)

St. Augustine: Once and for all, a short rule is laid down for you: Love, and do what you will. If you keep silence, do it out of love. If you cry out, do it out of love. If you refrain from punishing, do it out of love. Let the root of love be within. From such a root nothing but good can come. (10)

St. Augustine:

Late have I loved You, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, Late have I loved You! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for You. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which You created. You were within me, but I was not with You. Created things kept me from You; yet if they had not been in You they would not have been at all. You called, You shouted and You broke through my deafness. You flashed, You shone and You dispelled my blindness. You breathed Your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for You. I have tasted You, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me and I burned for Your peace. (11)

(photo: omitted)

(photo: omitted)

Ronald Rolheiser O.M.I.: God's love isn't a reward for being good, doing our duty, resisting temptation, bearing the heat of the day in fidelity, saying our prayers, remaining pure, or offering worship, good and important though these are. God loves us because God is love and God cannot not love and cannot be discriminating in love. God's love, as scripture says, shines on the good and bad alike. That's nice to know when we need forgiveness and unmerited love, but it's hard to accept when that forgiveness and love is given to those whom we deem less worthy of it, to those who didn't seem to do their duty. It's not easy to accept that God's love does not discriminate, especially when God's blessings go out lavishly to those who don't seem to deserve them. (12)

Ernesto Cardenal: Picasso was right when he said that we do not know what a tree or a window really is. All things are very mysterious and strange (like Picasso's paintings), and we overlook their strangeness and their mystery only because we are so used to them. Only dimly do we understand the nature of things. What are things? They are God's love become things.

God also communicates with us by way of all things. They are messages of love. When I read a book, God is speaking to me through this book. I raise my eyes to look at the countryside: God created it for me to see. The picture I look at today was inspired by God in the painter, for me to see. Everything I enjoy was given lovingly by God for me to enjoy and even my pain is God's loving gift. (13)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning:
 Earth's crammed with heaven,
 And every common bush afire with God;
 And only he who sees takes off his shoes;
 The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries. (14)

Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.:
 Pied Beauty
 Glory be to God for dappled things - For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow; For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim; Fresh-firecoal chestnut-fall.; finches' wings; Landscape plotted and pieced - fold, fallow, and plough; And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim. All things counter, original, spare, strange; Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?) With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim; He father-forth whose beauty is past change: Praise him.

William Blake:
 To see a World in a Grain of Sand
 And Heaven in a Wild Flower
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
 And Eternity in an hour. (15)

(photo: omitted)

Denise Levertov:
 The Avowal
 As swimmers dare
 To lie face to the sky
 And water bears them,
 As hawks rest upon air
 And air sustains them,
 So would I learn to attain
 Freefall, and float
 Into Creator Spirits deep embrace,
 Knowing no effort earns
 That all-surrounding grace. (16)

Chapter review

Summary

The gift of faith expands the breadth and depth of the meaning of freedom. Christian freedom is grounded in our relationship with God or - more accurately - God's relationship with us.

St. Paul helped us to see the mystery of the gift of freedom. It was not our keeping the Law that made us free, but faith in Jesus Christ.

This freedom is due primarily and exclusively to the action of the Holy Spirit. The love of God and the life of Christ dwell in us through the Spirit. The desire for freedom is the Spirit's desire in us that we be free. Nothing can separate us from this love or from this desire for freedom that lies deep within us.

We do not earn God's love and eternal life by moral living; rather, God gives us his life, love and everlasting happiness simply because God loves us.

Moral living is the way we offer thanks for God's gifts of mercy and love.

Legalism is an approach to morality that asserts blind obedience to the law. It excludes any consideration of faith or truth or reason other than the law. It is a counterfeit approach to morality.

Laws imposed from the outside are only for those who are not free. For those who are free, the law comes from within.

The truth sets us free. Jesus is the Truth.

Grace is the gift of God's love at the centre of our existence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It responds to the deepest human yearnings for freedom, perfects freedom, and calls the freedom it perfects to cooperate with it.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain St. Paul's understanding of righteousness as coming from faith in Christ.
2. If, as St. Paul asserts, the Mosaic Law does not set us free, of what value is the Law in our moral life?

Thinking and inquiry

3. How is the gift of freedom an invitation to give generously of ourselves?
4. Identify and explain how many people in our culture are "Pelagians" in their approach to life.

Communication

5. Using as an inspiration the reflections on grace in the last section of this chapter, create your own reflection on the meaning of grace in poetic or artistic form.
6. In the vein of the "Ben Shaw story" at the beginning of this chapter, search for similar stories in current publications or film, or write your own, and present them to the class.

Application

7. Explain how the law of love that St. Paul writes about applies in today's society. Is this a utopian vision from another place and time, or are we, as Christians, called to embody our faith in daily life today? How are we to accomplish this?

Glossary

conversion: A radical transformation of the person, a turning around. At the intellectual level, it takes place as an awareness and openness to truth and true knowing. At the moral level, it takes place when I recognize myself as free and responsible. At the religious level, it takes place where my pre-occupation with myself is taken over with the love of God and love for others.

freedom: St. Paul helps us to understand freedom as the love of God and the life of Christ dwelling in us through the Spirit. The desire for freedom is the Spirit's desire in us that we be free. This freedom is life lived in the love of God.

grace: The gift of God's life and love at the centre of our existence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the source of our life, through whom we become free and capable to love.

legalism: Literal interpretation of the law, and attitude that something is right because it is commanded to be so.

Pelagianism: An erroneous teaching that proposed that our ultimate happiness is due to our own efforts and good works, and not due to God's graciousness.

righteousness: Our right relationship with each other and before God. Jesus revealed that we do not earn God's love and eternal life by moral living. Rather, God gives us his life, love and everlasting happiness simply because God loves us. Moral living is our response to this free gift.

truth: Simply put, Jesus is the Truth. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus dwells within us. The grace of God moves us toward the truth and the truth sets us free.

Unit V

Proclaiming justice and mercy

Introduction

Pope Paul VI said that "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world" is a "constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel" (Synod on Justice, 1971, # 6). Doing justice is essential for the gospel to take root and to set humanity free. Justice is a key virtue for an ordered society. It regulates the distribution of goods. It reckons the healing of the social order when it has been jeopardized by criminal offences. It measures what is owed to each. It is the essential social virtue. Without it no human society can live well.

Chapter 13 examines mainly distributive justice. Distributive justice explores how a society can value each one equally with an unequal distribution of its wealth. What makes such an unequal distribution of wealth ethical or moral? Philosophers and politicians struggle with this issue constantly. Justice is a foundational virtue for life together. In the Bible justice is fundamental to our covenant with God. The Sermon on the Mount insists on relationships based on love - even love of enemies - yet it does not relegate justice to a lower order. The law of love is incomprehensible without a clear sense of justice. Love presupposes justice and rests on it. Love and justice meet in the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Matthew 7.12)

Today we speak of ecological justice - the earth and its well-being are owed their due. The devastating effect of chemical technology, for example, on plant life and insect and birds have revealed the vulnerability of the ecosystem and made imperative a new sensitivity to human life within the whole cosmic evolution. Chapter 14 examines this new area of justice.

Any reflection on ethics and morality must deal with the disorder that humans create. Within the religious tradition of Judeo-Christianity this disorder is understood as a breach of relationship between God and humanity. It is called sin. Chapter 15 is an examination of sin, both personal and social. At the same time, the chapter focuses on the promise of pardon, reconciliation and forgiveness. Can what we do ever be undone? Must we forever remain a prisoner of our own past? The Christian hope in the resurrection proclaims pardon and reconciliation. It remembers how after his death Jesus appeared to his followers and offered them peace: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven." (John 20.23) Do we not pray in the Our Father: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us"? Reconciliation and forgiveness are the great gifts of the resurrection.

Chapter 13

"I the Lord justice" (Isaiah 61.8)

For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly and if a poor person in dirt clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?

Letter of James 2.2-5

Focus your learning

Cognitive; Identify the key principles of Christian justice.

Practical; Explain the relationship between justice and love as reflected in our faith tradition.

Affective; Become familiar with stories of people who live justly.

Key terms in this chapter

common good; economics; Golden Rule; justice: commutative; legal; distributive; private property; righteous; solidarity

Smell the kingdom

At 32, Barbara lived in a wonderful world. Her husband was loving, her children healthy, her home happy. Rarely did a dark thought cross her optimistic mind. It was a friend who first invited Barbara to volunteer at the soup kitchen. The invitation was added to many others she received these days... the garden club, the parent group at school, the Cancer Society and, it seemed, a hundred others. One bright morning in early December off she drove in her new Taurus to work a few hours preparing and serving a hot meal for the city's poor. She felt deliciously unselfish.

As she drove to the kitchen, Barbara entered a part of her own city she had never seen before. The buildings were dilapidated, the streets and sidewalks dirt and unkempt. People in dull tattered clothing seemed to wander aimlessly about.

As she entered the soup kitchen, the first sensation that struck her was the SMELL. .. a heavy mixture of cabbage, sweat and unchanged babies. Barbara wanted to vomit. She looked around and saw about fifty people sitting passively at the tables, waiting. Few spoke to one another. Most stared listlessly into space. The men had not shaved. The women were either too fat or frighteningly thin.

(photo: omitted)

The whole room reverberated with constant coughing. Barbara wanted to run back to her new Taurus and escape to the cleanliness and order of her home in the suburbs.

Just then, an old woman reached out and touched her arm. Barbara was afraid until she looked into the woman's face and saw eyes glistening with love and the beginnings of a smile on her lips. "Don't be afraid, Sweetie," the old woman began. "We're just like you. We had a little bad luck or a problem we couldn't beat.

Look at John over there. He has been in a mental hospital for seven years, just out and no place to go. Look at Joni, from a rich family. Had a nice husband, too, until he left her with five kids. We aren't bad folks, just poor."

Barbara blushed and felt her knees shaking. She eased into a chair next to the old woman and tried to smile. The old woman picked up the conversation, "All you need to do is just sit here and talk to me. The folks understand how you feel. They'll help you get adjusted and maybe become your friends if you will let them."

Barbara smiled. She had come to give something and here she was receiving. She was learning about a new reality, the reality of the poor. Suddenly she remembered the words from the Gospel she had never understood, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God." She was in the kingdom and it smelled like cabbage, sweat and unchanged babies. (1)

(photo: omitted)

Guiding questions

1. This was how Barbara awakened to God's kingdom in her life. How is God's kingdom, or presence, breaking into your life?
2. Something happened when Barbara looked into the face of the old woman. How would Levinas (Chapter 1) explain this encounter in terms of morality and ethics?
3. Do you think this story has any lesson in it about justice? Explain your answer.

Who is the just person?

The Old Testament points out a number of people whom it calls just, or righteous. In the story of Moses, we are told how one day, while the Hebrew people were lost in the desert, they found themselves longing for the meat, fish, cucumbers, leeks, onions and garlic they had grown accustomed to eating as slaves in Egypt. So they complained about the miraculous food - the manna - the Lord sent them each day as they wandered in the desert. They complained that they were tired of the same thing every day, pining for the variety of food that was theirs as slaves. It must have been a trying time for Moses. Moses complained to the Lord by saying, "Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all these people on me? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child; to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? ... I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me'" (Numbers 11.10-14). In the Jewish tradition, Moses was a just and a righteous person because he was someone who carried the burdens of others, who endangered his own life so that others were made free, who stood up for the rights of the voiceless, and who interceded for the powerless.

In the biblical tradition, a just person is sensitive and faithful to the demands of others because that was the basis of the old covenant: to be just with others. Hence, justice under the old covenant is about persons relating consciously to the needs of others in terms of their human dignity as created, loved and prized by God. Justice is about relating rightly with others. For Moses, being just was an exhausting experience of the disproportion between the demands of his people and his capacity to help them. Becoming a just person is often like that.

In the New Testament, God reveals the just and righteous one to be Jesus Christ. He bore the burdens of others. His whole ministry was to the poor, the sick, the overburdened. He bore their illness and their sin. He even went so far as to seek God's forgiveness for what others did to him: "Father, forgive them," he prayed, "for they do not know what they are doing" (Matthew 23.34). He is a model of how we are to live with and for others. Luke calls Jesus the Righteous One as if it were his proper name. With him justice came to mean an excess of generosity. "Though he was sinless, he suffered willingly for sinners. Though innocent, he accepted death to save the guilty." (2) Offering one's innocent life in order to save the guilty seems like excessive generosity but not in the tradition of those who follow Christ.

By accepting responsibility for the other, including the poor, the guilty and the sinful other, we serve as the hands and feet, eyes and ears of God in this world. This is what our Catholic faith tradition presents as our calling to be just and to bring justice into our relationships. In this chapter we examine our call to justice. (3)

Different types of justice

Our Catholic tradition is closely tied to justice. The connection is found first in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ. In the first years after his death and resurrection, Jesus' followers sought to live justly despite an often hostile and violent environment. At that time, Christians celebrated their call to justice by sharing in the one cup and the one bread. The Eucharist, which celebrates the new covenant, continues to this day to unite us with the "Just One" and with one another. Justice is integral to the gospel and, likewise, to the act of receiving Holy Communion (the body and blood of Jesus). It is also a communion of love and justice with others.

There are three types of relationships that undergird the notion of justice:

Commutative justice: the relationship of one individual to another individual

Legal justice: the relationship of the individual to society or the state

Distributive justice: the relationship of society or the government to the individual

Commutative justice pertains to contractual relationships between individuals and between institutions that have the legal status of a person. Institutions with this status are called corporations. Corporations may include associations, retail stores, schools, sports clubs, law firms, religious communities, and dioceses. The contracts and agreements that make up the basis of relationships at this level are subject to commutative justice.

Commutative justice, in a certain sense, is not personal. Consider, for example, what happens when you are clothes shopping. A pair of jeans in a store costs the same whether you are a wealthy person or poor person. The retailer does not make distinctions. The pair of jeans forms the basis of your legal or contractual relationship to the retailer. Contracts and agreements of this nature are impersonal and blind. Take another example: You are seeking a bank loan. The laws that govern banks and their clients form the basis of your relationship when the bank approves your loan. The bank loan is therefore a contractual, rather than a personal, relationship. It is a business/client relationship, just as the relationship at the clothing store is a retailer/customer relationship.

Commutative justice is important because of the fiduciary nature of all agreements and contracts (that is, agreements based on trust and confidence that the other person will respect the agreement). Society is built on trust in the word that is given to another. Without it, society quickly slides into anarchy and mistrust, which take such forms as shoplifting, shoddy workmanship, stealing tools on the job, absenteeism, inflated invoices, theft, robbery, etc.

(photo: omitted)

Guiding questions

1. Give examples of incidences of commutative justice in your life.
2. What is the importance of a signature on a contract?

Legal justice refers to the relationship of the individual to society. It is also known as contributive justice. In the past legal justice concerned itself primarily with the individuals obedience to the laws of society or the state. A citizen's relationship to society or the state was straightforward: You obeyed the laws or you paid the penalty for lawlessness. During the last decades, legal justice has come to be understood more in terms of what the individual in society can contribute beyond the keeping of the law.

We are expected not only to obey but also to participate in creating laws that benefit the good of society. Legal justice today means that we contribute to the life of society. That is why some call this justice contributive justice. We accept not only the right to vote but also the obligation to vote. We enter into the dialogue of contemporary society by writing letters to the editor, contributing to Internet blogs and community meetings, participating in neighbourhood watch and recycling programs, conserving energy, etc. Perhaps the most celebrated expression of contributive justice is captured in the inaugural address of President John F. Kennedy, who on January 20, 1961, said, "Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country." (See Chapter 18 for more on contributive justice.)

Guiding questions

3. What are some programs of legal (contributive) justice in your community?
4. What is the importance of legal justice for society or the state?

Distributive justice pertains to the relationship of the government or society to the individual. In Chapter 11 we saw how the unequal distribution of goods, in a society where everyone is in principle equal, showed itself to be the burning issue of modern liberal democratic societies. What is the obligation of the government towards its citizens? Whatever program of distribution of the burdens and benefits the government adopts, it is subject to distributive justice. What are the goods of distributive justice? Distributive justice deals with all sorts of goods that are not economic. In order to discuss the dilemma of unequal distribution and basic equality, we must begin by recognizing that there is a variety of goods, and that justice operates differently in each sphere:

The good of citizenship, which deals with the conditions of becoming a citizen; how citizenship is lost; the rights of residents,

strangers, immigrants, refugees, and political exiles; the right to vote and participate; freedom of expression. How does the state distribute these goods, for instance, to determine a just immigration policy? What is a just policy regarding the acceptance of refugees? Is it just to have an unequal distribution of the rights of citizenship among Native Canadians, those who are born in Canada, those who are naturalized Canadians, and recent immigrants to Canada?

The good of security and public assistance (welfare), which responds to the needs of those who have the right to public protection and help. What is a just system of welfare for the psychologically, physically and socially disadvantaged? What sort of health care is just? Within a universal health care system is it just to give those who can afford it a quicker access or preferential access to health care? Is it part of distributive justice to provide assistance to those who are unemployed? Are there limits to the law that protects the individuals right to privacy?

The economic good, which regulates the area of money and merchandise. This area of goods touches on salaries and wages for work, the economic benefit of the stock market and banking, the availability of consumer goods, the right to private property. There are, however, limits. Persons have a value but not a price. If persons are not to be measured by a price, the question arises whether it is permissible to patent life forms or the genetic code of DNA, even of genetically modified plant seeds and stem cells.

The good of offices and positions, where the distribution is not to be based on heredity or wealth, but on qualifications set by public procedures. Everyone must be, in principle, eligible. No one may be excluded for reasons of age, sex, or religion. (4)

Guiding questions

5. Select one of the goods and study its distribution in Canada. (For example, research the welfare rates in your province or territory and compare them to the cost of living.)
6. Calculate the annual income of someone working for the minimum wage. Make a budget based on this income.

The distribution of wealth in Canada in 2000

Data from Statistics Canada on financial security gives the following picture of the distribution of wealth in Canada.

The wealthiest 10 percent of family units held 53 percent of the wealth in 1999. The wealthiest 50 percent of family units controlled an almost unbelievable 94.4 percent of the wealth, leaving only 5.6 percent for the bottom 50 percent.

The poorest 10 percent of family units have negative average wealth or more debts than assets. Average wealth adjusted for inflation for the poorest ten percent actually declined by 28 percent from -\$8,031 in 1970 to -\$10,656 in 1999.

The average wealth adjusted for inflation for the richest 10 percent of family units increased from \$442,468 in 1970 to \$980,903 in 1999 - an increase of 122 percent.

The poorest 20 percent of family units had financial assets of only \$1,974 on average in 1999, and their average income in 1998 was only \$18,698. If their current income suddenly disappeared, their financial assets alone would be enough to keep the family going for barely five weeks.

About 60 percent of family units were homeowners, and the other 40 percent were renters. The median wealth of homeowners with mortgages was \$111,807 in 1999, and the median wealth of homeowners without mortgages was \$259,200. The median wealth of renters was only \$8,000. (5)

Given the statistics above, one might ask, who is being taxed the most? the least? Have governments been effective in fortifying safety net programs for the poor? Have governments weakened social safety nets? What are the ethical principles to critique government action in this area?

(photo: omitted)

The social doctrine of the Church

In her social teaching, the Church addresses these and other issues. References are provided to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

The meaning of work has a religious and moral value (2427)
 The right to economic activity (2429, 2430)
 The responsibility of the state (2431)
 The responsibility of the business world (2432)
 Access to employment (2433)
 A just wage (2434)
 Legitimacy of a strike (2435)
 Obligations of rich nations (2437-2439)
 Direct aid to poor nations (2440)
 The right of nations to seek and find their potential (2440-2441)
 Love for the poor (2443-2449)

Social justice and the Catholic Church

The Church has sought to live and act within different forms of government, voicing its dissent whenever important values were threatened. The Catholic Church does not identify with any one type of government: whether liberal democratic, communist, tribal or monarchical. History has seen many attempts to find a just method to govern people. With the demise of the communist approach to governing, and the rise of theocratic fundamentalist governments in some Muslim countries, there appears to be no easy alternatives to liberal democracy. For example, the Magisterium must guide the Catholic faithful who live in China, where the political system is communist. At the same time, the Church's teaching on justice must guide the Catholic community in Iraq, where tribal, democratic and theocratic political ideologies are in conflict. And the Catholic Church's teaching on justice must assist the Catholic faithful in the many countries of Africa and South America, where liberal democracy is often a new and relatively untried system.

The Catholic Church brings the gospel perspective of justice to bear on all political and economic systems. When it comes to social justice there can be no neutral point of view. A reflection on social justice in Canada must take account of the situation created by our liberal democracy. It must consider the influences of governments and transnational corporations on the economic situation. Catholic social teaching stretching back to the nineteenth century provides us with principles of social justice to ground our reflection on this reality. Most of the social encyclicals of the recent popes, from 1891 (*Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII) to the present, can be understood as a response to Western democracies. The Church's teaching offers several bases for re-thinking social questions in terms of justice.

Ownership of property

Many traditional societies accept common ownership of property. In modern developed societies this common ownership would probably lead to conflict. For quite some time in the West, particularly because of the emphasis placed on private property by the political theorists Hobbes and Locke, the emphasis was placed on the right to own property. Property and the ownership of property came to be seen as an extension of owning a body. Today in our much more complex and technological society, you may no longer need a piece of property to survive, but you do need material goods. In an economy no longer based on agriculture and fisheries, you need special skills to make a living; you gain wealth through creativity and entrepreneurship. Today the question is not so

much focused on private property but on material goods in general.

In a variety of social encyclicals, the popes have weighed in on the topic of private property. The Church's position is best summarized by saying that "the right to private property is valid and necessary" (6) but it is not an absolute right. The earth first of all belongs to God the Creator. Humans are at most stewards of this gift. All have, therefore, a God-given right to be sustained by the earth. The reality of famine anywhere in the world elects all to responsibility. The ownership of property is therefore subject to a higher principle, namely, that the "goods of this world are originally meant for all." (7) It means that private property has a social function justified "by the principle of the universal destiny of goods." (8) Private property for this reason is always to be seen in relation to all the goods of creation which, in the final analysis, are to serve the needs of all. The issue of the distribution of material goods, however, has not disappeared. The concern today is no longer a national issue but a global one: "The most pressing question of our day concerns the relationship between economically advanced commonwealths and those that are in process of development." (9)

Guiding questions

1. The right to private property is not an absolute right. What are the implications of this teaching?
2. Why is it no longer adequate today to speak only about the right of private property? Why must the right to own material goods be considered as well?

Solidarity

Most modern political theories have a common point of departure: the individual and his or her instincts and drives to possess him or herself and material goods. This individual's bond to a larger social whole is based on a tacit "social contract" which obliges each citizen to abide by the social arrangement. The social bond must be so constructed as to be in the individual's self-interest. Historically, the motivation for compliance has mostly been fear of death (Hobbes) or fear of chaos and unremitting confrontation.

Catholic social teaching has consistently advocated another style of social relationship with a different point of departure: the common good. Catholic social teaching says that individual goods ought to serve the common good. Justice, not fear, is what binds us to this common good. And solidarity is the virtue that binds us to one another in the distribution of wealth. This solidarity can be understood in its widest sense as a solidarity with God's love of creation. It can also be seen as a solidarity with those who are near to us (family, community, country) and far away (all are children of God). And finally, it is seen as solidarity with the earth and the earth's ecosystems (see Chapter 14). What has become more central in our understanding of solidarity is the solidarity with the poor, also known as the "preferential option for the poor."

(photo: omitted)

The "preferential option for the poor" must be understood as a commitment to the poor on account of God's concern for the poor. This principle of Catholic social teaching is a recent development. The U.S bishops in their pastoral letter on the economy (10) understand the principle as follows:

[It is] an obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless... The "option for the poor," therefore, is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. Rather it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community... These wounds will be healed only by greater solidarity with the poor and among the poor themselves. (#87-88)

This solidarity with the poor suggests that when we consider problems of the social order, our solutions must bear in mind the people who are poor and powerless. The U.S. bishops proposed three priorities in economic decision-making:

The fulfillment of the basic needs of the poor is the highest priority...

Increasing active participation in economic life by those who are presently excluded or vulnerable is a high social priority...

The investment of wealth, talent, or human energy should be specially directed to benefit those who are poor or economically insecure. (# 90-92)

Guiding questions

3. What is the meaning of "preferential option for the poor"?

4. What is the meaning of the "preferential option for the poor" in light of the huge discrepancy of wealth in Canada? How are goods redistributed to the poor?

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you apply the following test: Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj (self rule) for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away.

M. K. Gandhi

(photo: omitted)

Proportional equality

What justifies that a hockey player earns \$4 million a year while a single mother working as a waitress receives the minimum wage? If before God all are equal, should there not be more equality in remuneration for work done?

Commutative justice was described above as blind. It makes no difference whether I owe \$50 to Wayne Gretzky or to the grocer down the street. It is still \$50. In distributive justice, on the other hand, there is no such arithmetic equality. It is proportional. It asks, "What is a fair or just distribution of wealth or material goods?" Here are four criteria that have been used to measure the just distribution of economic goods:

1. Need. Pope John Paul II says, "It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental human needs to remain unsatisfied..." (11) Every human being has the right to a decent human living. The distribution of goods must therefore provide at least a minimum standard of living. There is a standard, therefore, below which society must intervene. When the number of food banks and the number of homeless increase in a country, questions need to be asked about whether welfare subsidies have fallen too low, what can be done about subsidized housing, and whether programs for employment need to be revised. The support given to those who cannot take care of themselves and are dependent on social assistance must be enough to take care of the fundamental human needs of food and shelter.

2. A just wage. Interestingly enough a just wage does not fall under commutative justice, as we might expect. After all, wages are about a contractual relationship between individuals, or between individuals and corporations. According to Catholic teaching, however, a just wage falls under distributive justice. Because work is personal and necessary, this means that "Each one has a right to procure what is required in order to live." (12) Ultimately, it is not the contract, but the need, that ought to determine the wage. A just wage is a wage that allows one to fulfill the basic needs of human life. The needs of one person are higher than another and there is a considerable difference between the desires, capacities and powers of each worker. A just wage should permit each one to have his or her basic needs fulfilled.

How would you reconcile this teaching with the commutative notions of "equal pay for work of equal value"?

3. Effort and skill required. Unequal remuneration is also due to the different levels of effort and skill needed to do the work. In our economy wage levels are determined by a number of factors, including the power of the union, the success of the firm, the scarcity or abundance of workers in a field and the popularity of the product. At the level of justice, outside of other factors, effort and skill ought to be rewarded proportionately.

4. Productivity. In current economies it is the higher level of productivity which is frequently cited as the reason for higher salaries. At an individual level, the brain surgeon makes a greater contribution to the health of a patient than the attendant nurse and hence remuneration will differ. (13)

(photo: omitted)

Market forces and the common good

76; The Catholic doctrine of the common good is incompatible with unlimited free-market, or laissez-faire, capitalism, which insists that the distribution of wealth must occur entirely according to the dictates of market forces. This theory presupposes that the common good will take care of itself, being identified with the summation of vast numbers of individual consumer decisions in a fully competitive, and entirely free, market economy. Its central dogma (as expressed by Adam Smith, the founding father of capitalist theory, in his *The Wealth of Nations* 1776) is the belief that in an entirely free economy, each citizen, through seeking his own gain, would be "led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was not part of his intention," namely the prosperity of society. This does sometimes happen; but to say that it invariably must happen, as if by a God-given natural law, is a view which can amount to idolatry or a form of economic superstition. Smith himself did not appear to think the rule was invariable, for he also observed "By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of society."

77; The Catholic Church, in its social teaching, explicitly rejects belief in the automatic beneficence of market forces. It insists that the end result of market forces must be scrutinised and if necessary corrected in the name of natural law, social justice, human rights, and the common good. Left to themselves, market forces are just as likely to lead to evil results as to good ones. It is often overlooked that Adam Smith himself did not envisage markets operating in a value-free society, but assumed that individual consumer choices would be governed by moral considerations, not least the demands of justice.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales:
 The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching, 1996.

Taxation: A tool of distributive justice

Governments redistribute wealth within a society by means of taxes. Taxes also allow the state to provide services for the common good - law enforcement, health care, education, transportation, infrastructure, foreign affairs, public safety, the judiciary, and so on. Citizens have an obligation and responsibility to pay for these public goods through their taxes. The only equitable way of regulating the tax burden is to have people pay progressively more according to their means.

As the U.S. bishops stated it, 'The tax system should be structured according to the principle of progressivity so that those with relatively greater financial resources pay a higher rate of taxation. The inclusion of such a principle in tax policies is an important means of reducing the severe inequalities of income and wealth in the nation.' (14) In other words, those who possess more pay more to the common good. Those who have very little pay very little, or nothing at all. The neediest members of society receive a basic level of support funded by the taxes on the more wealthy.

What are the taxation rates in Canada? Are they proportionally or progressively distributed?

Discuss the merit of progressive tax rates. Would a flat tax be just?

(photo: omitted)

The landowner and the workers

In Matthew 20.1-16, Jesus tells a parable in which there is talk of wages:

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

In the parable the landowner pays the same wage for different hours of work. Our immediate reaction to the behaviour of the landowner is that something is not quite just. If he could be generous to the workers of the last hour, why could he not be generous with the workers of the first hour - despite the original agreement? The parable sets us up to react in this manner. According to the underlying expectation, our worth is measured by the wage we receive. A wage determines where we fit in the scheme of things. And so for us the right wage is a matter of justice. This parable subverts this expectation. The landowner offers those who worked all day a full day's wage; to the other workers from the third hour onward he promises what is right; to the workers of the final hour he makes no verbal agreement at all. We expect some kind of gradation in pay but the landowner pays all the workers the same amount. Our worth is not measured by our wage. The justice of the kingdom of God is obviously of a different texture than the justice the reader expects.

The point of the parable is to be found in verse 15: "Are you envious because I am generous?" Through the parable, Jesus confronts our legalistic notion of what is right, a notion that misrepresents God's goodness. Jesus is making the point that God's mercy surpasses all human measure and is not to be equated with strict

(photo: omitted)

human justice. We have in the parable a striking picture of God's unfathomable generosity.

What does this parable teach us in terms of social justice? In our human relations and dealings with others, the Christian cannot be content merely to grant to others that which they have a strict right to receive. Love transcends and goes beyond merely giving people their due. As St. Thomas Aquinas puts it, "Justice without mercy cannot be perfect virtue." (15) A second lesson to draw from the parable is this: we should not look for evil where there is only good. All too often it is too easy to discredit another's good works because that person's generosity is upsetting our own narrow vision of justice.

Guiding questions

1. What do you consider to be a just wage? On what principles do you base your judgment?
2. Compare your answer with the response to the workers of the first hour in the parable of Jesus.
3. How could we apply in today's world the kind of generosity to which Jesus calls us? Explain.

Economic activity and social justice Catechism of the Catholic Church

(photo: omitted)

2427; Human work proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another... Work honours the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive.

2428; In work, the person exercises and fulfils in part the potential inscribed in his nature. The primordial value of labour stems from man himself, its author and beneficiary. Work is for man, not man for work.

2429; Everyone has the right of economic initiative; everyone should make legitimate use of his talents to contribute to the abundance that will benefit all, and to harvest the just fruits of his labour. He should seek to observe regulations issued by legitimate authority for the sake of the common good.

2430; Economic life brings into play different interests, often opposed to one another. This explains why the conflicts that characterize it arise. Efforts should be made to reduce these conflicts by negotiation that respects the rights and duties of each social partner: those responsible for business enterprises, representatives of wage-earners - for example, trade unions - and public authorities when appropriate.

2431; The responsibility of the state. "Economic activity, especially the activity of a market economy, cannot be conducted in an institutional, juridical or political vacuum. On the contrary, it presupposes sure guarantees of individual freedom and private property, as well as a stable currency and efficient public services. Hence the principal task of the state is to guarantee this security, so that those who work and produce can enjoy the fruits of their labours and thus feel encouraged to work efficiently and honestly... Another task of

the state is that of overseeing and directing the exercise of human rights in the economic sector. However, primary responsibility in this area belongs not to the state but to individuals and to the various groups and associations which make up society."

2432; Those responsible for business enterprises are responsible to society for the economic and ecological effects of their operations. They have an obligation to consider the good of persons and not only the increase of profits. Profits are necessary, however. They make possible the investments that ensure the future of a business and they guarantee employment.

2433; Access to employment and to professions must be open to all without unjust discrimination: men and women, healthy and disabled, natives and immigrants. For its part society should, according to circumstances, help citizens find work and employment.

2434; A just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice. In determining fair pay both the needs and the contributions of each person must be taken into account. "Remuneration for work should guarantee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level, taking into account the role and the productivity of each, the state of the business, and the common good." Agreement between the parties is not sufficient to justify morally the amount to be received in wages.

(photo: omitted)

Love, justice and the Golden Rule

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour.

(Judaism)

What you do not want done to yourself, do not do unto others.

(Confucianism)

Let no man do to another that which would be repugnant to himself.

(Hinduism)

Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

(Buddhism)

Justice has been defined as giving each person his or her due. In commutative justice this means acting in accordance to agreements and contracts. It is called a blind justice because it applies equally to all. I give so that you may give. This justice works with a logic of equivalence. I give the equivalent to what you give. In distributive justice we saw that the equivalence is not arithmetic but proportional – proportional to needs. Still there is an equivalence: I give so that you may live.

The Sermon on the Mount (or "in the plain") points us toward another option in distributive justice. It has become known as the Golden Rule. It seems on first reading not to be radically different from the logic of equivalency. We have two readings of it in the New Testament:

Matthew 7.12: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you."

Luke 6.31: "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

Jesus has taken this Golden Rule - which in a negative form also exists in other world religions (see margin) - and given it a surprising new meaning. The Golden Rule is in the language of justice: do to others what you would have them do to you. It seems very close to the definition of justice: give to everyone his or her due. But in the context of the Sermon, Jesus obviously means something more. In a sequence of questions, it is clear that if the Golden Rule appears at first sight to be the usual understanding of reciprocal justice, Jesus wants us to think again:

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from

whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. (Luke 6.32-34)

These words appear almost contrary to the Golden Rule. These sayings push for much more than just "loving those who love you." They want us to go beyond equivalence to a decidedly uneven equation: love your enemies; lend, expecting nothing in return. This is the sort of logic of grace, or of the gospel. It operates not out of measuring with impartiality the rights and duties of the one over and against the rights and duties of another. Here the measurement is of abundance: lend without expecting a return. It is not "I give in order that you will give," but "Give because it has been given you." In this case we are asked to interpret the Golden Rule in terms of generosity because God has been generous:

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other as well; and from him who takes away your cloak do not withhold your coat as well. Give to everyone who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods, do not ask them again. (Luke 6.27-30)

This is a higher commitment to justice which seeks to move beyond the "give that you may give" to an overwhelming of the other with the power of love. This is a disinterested justice: I have no interest in what the other will give to me. I act only out of love and generosity. We have seen some live this way: Jesus himself St. Francis of Assisi and Gandhi, to name a few. We also see it in the concern of the Church for the poor. We see it reflected in John Rawls's second principle: "All social primary goods - liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and these bases of self-respect - are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favoured." The law of justice injected with the "law" of love would create a healthy equilibrium in the practice of justice. It would suggest that love asks for more, never for less, than what justice requires.

Guiding questions

1. How does Jesus understand justice in the Golden Rule?
2. What happens to justice when it enters into dialogue with love?

Living Christian justice

Douglas Roche, Mary Jo Leddy and Rosalie Bertell model for us what it means to be motivated by a sense of Christian justice. They share with us in their own words what they understand to be a concrete expression of Christian love.

Douglas Roche

Senator Douglas Roche, O.C., made the following statement on the occasion of the terrorist attacks on the United States. On September 11, 2001, terrorists, using hijacked civilian aircraft as weapons, destroyed the World Trade Center in New York, a wing of the Pentagon, and also crashed United Airlines flight 93 into a field, killing nearly 3,000 people that day, and changing the world forever.

Douglas Roche was first editor of The Western Catholic Reporter, a former Member of Parliament from Edmonton, and chairman of the international organization of Parliamentarians for World Order, ambassador to the United Nations for peace and disarmament, a position

he held for five years, and served nine years in the Senate. He has continued to speak out on behalf of peace and disarmament and has written several books on militarization and development and is currently a lecturer at the University of Alberta.

September 12, 2001

Our first reaction to the horrible terrorist attacks in New York and Washington must be grief and prayers for the victims, their families and friends. An outflow of love and support for those so affected ought to guide our future actions.

The perpetrators of such evil acts must be brought to justice. But this must be done in a way that does not compound the violence. The law enforcement agencies must be given the resources they need to carry out their duties in maintaining order and apprehending criminals.

But revenge as an end in itself is unproductive and not worthy of the solemn obligation we have to ensure justice in the world. Rather we must be motivated by a determination to end violence by getting at the root causes of violence. We must strengthen the international institutions working in the law and economic development fields so that more hope is given to the vulnerable, the oppressed and dispossessed that they can obtain the social justice that is their due without recourse to violence.

At this tragic moment, Canada has a special role to play in continuing to reach out to the United States with love and support to help the U.S. cope with a challenge of immense proportions. Canada, through its political and diplomatic work, must help the U.S. recognize that working multilaterally with the many governments, agencies and civil society leaders around the world is a far better response than acting alone. Canadian foreign policy should be directed at helping the U.S. to combat terrorism with comprehensive strategies that include the economic and social development of peoples around the world.

The New York/Washington attacks were attacks against humanity. They require a humanity-centered response. (16)

Douglas Roche
(photo: omitted)

Spirit that matters

By Mary Jo Leddy,
Founder and Director of Romero House for Refugees in Toronto, and author of *At the Border Called Hope and Radical Gratitude*.

Let me start by giving you snapshot scenes from the dispirited life I sense in Canada today.

Every night on the television news, talking heads solemnly declare: "The economy demands cuts; there must be layoffs. There is no other way; there is no other choice. This is reality."

The nurse manager of a Chronic Care unit in Toronto lamented to me, "We have the best rating in the province: best care, most cost effective, but they're going to close us. Its as if nothing we have done matters."

A congregational study group in Vancouver confesses, "We are all concerned about the economy, but we don't really know what we are talking about. We need to get an expert in."

These scenes are examples of the generalized sense of powerlessness and the vague sense of guilt which grips so many people in this country at this time. It is a dispiriting time.

When good people see the casualties of our present economic changes, they feel vaguely guilty; they think "We should do something" and "Somehow we're responsible, but we also feel powerless."... Deep down most people feel that it doesn't matter what they do or say.

We are perplexed and disturbed by this and we look for explanations... I suggest that much of our present sense of powerlessness and vague guilt has everything to do with the fact that we live in the culture of money - in the culture of consumerism. Capitalism is a form of materialism - the other form of materialism, communism, has been shown to be soul-destroying. But capitalism is also soul-destroying, dispiriting...

Capitalism works only as long as people want to shop; it works only as long as we want more, as we think we need more. Advertising is crucial to all of this because it sets up within us a craving for more, to the point where what once seemed like a luxury is now a necessity. We are encouraged to believe that: you must have more to be more: more things, more travel, more experiences, more relationships, even more spirituality. The message we get is "if you have more, you will be happy." It is a promise... We begin to believe that freedom is not a political reality, but it is having all these choices in the supermarket, such as twenty kinds of cereal... In the culture of money, you are someone, if you have a car, if you get mail and you get catalogues and you shop.

The internal contradiction of capitalism is that it promises happiness which it will never deliver - not cannot, will never. It capitalizes on that deep human need for happiness - a need recognized long ago by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas who said that we are meant for happiness. Whomever you allow to define happiness will have the power to direct your life - not by coercion, but by seduction. In the consumer culture, our very best desires are turned into a drivenness - a compulsive searching for happiness. Although advertising communicates the promise of happiness, it must never be fulfilled because if you were satisfied, why would you shop. In the culture of consumerism, you must remain perpetually unsatisfied...

Mary Jo Leddy
(photo: omitted)

In this culture, the deep sense of dissatisfaction becomes internalized at almost every level of our being so that "I don't have enough" becomes "I am not enough" or "I am not good enough." It isn't just about shopping and having things. It begins to transform us. "I am not enough" is a feeling of powerlessness. "I am not good enough" is a feeling of vague guilt...

Can we do something about this: in our own lives, in our place of work, in our churches, in our country? Will it matter? Will it make any difference? It would be obvious and easy to say that we should try to do something to change our political and economic situation - models of social change and social justice. But if we don't believe that what we do and what we think really matters or makes a difference, we will probably not even try. We will complain. We will blame...

Any change in our dispiriting situation must begin with a transformation of spirit. The change begins, I believe, not with an agonizing sense of guilt, but with a simple act of gratitude. It is simple, but the simplest things are often difficult. Gratitude is the only way to find our way back to the ground of our being and our way forward to the point of our being. I do not mean gratitude for this or that thing - but gratitude for the most obvious and most miraculous fact that we are alive. This is what we most take for granted...

To become grateful is to say of our lives "it is enough." This is the beginning of the transformation of spirit. To begin to say "I have enough" is the beginning of transformation on other levels of our being: I have enough. I am enough. I am good enough. This is not mere assertiveness;

it is an act of gratitude and faith. It enables us to say: "I don't need to have more, in order to act. I don't need to be more, in order to act. I don't need to speak better, in order to speak out. Just as I am, here and now, I can do good. I can make a difference." And once again the miracle, as 2000 years ago: The deaf hear, the dumb speak, the lame walk. Then, as now, this is called the power of the spirit, spirit that matters, that makes a difference in this world...

Jesus said: "Happy are those who hunger and thirst for justice." Happy are those who desire to see and to share in the economy of grace. Who desire this, who are not driven. They will know that they will have enough energy, enough time, enough power to do good, to do justice. Happy are those who hunger for justice, for a world beyond cravings, beyond the permanent dissatisfaction of consumption and production. Happy are those who know what they are for, rather than what they are against; if we are only against something or someone, then we will become like what we are fighting against. But to seek justice, to love justice, is to become just.

Happy are those who know that spirit matters.

[Excerpt from Mary Jo Leddy's lecture in the series "Keeping the Spirit Alive" presented by St. Stephen's College]

Anti-nuclear nun

Dr. Rosalie Bertell, a Grey Nun for half a century, is an internationally recognized expert in the field of radiation.

By Donna Jean MacKinnon Toronto Star Staff Reporter May 3, 1998

Dr. Rosalie Bertell perches on a wooden chair in her small Harbourfront apartment. Animated, her eyes bright, she has a no-nonsense look on her face.

Bertell has been a Grey Nun for 50 years and, along the way, earned a doctorate in biometry and written books about radiation and its effect on the health of humanity and Planet Earth. No Immediate Danger: Prognosis for a Radioactive Earth has been translated into four languages and is about to come out in Russian.

Bertell, an environmental epidemiologist, is neither a recluse nor a denizen of the Ivory Tower. She is an activist and a self-confessed whistle blower.

After the Bhopal disaster in 1984, Bertell directed the International Medical Commission investigating the effects of the Union Carbide chemical spill that contributed to some 15,000 deaths. (* The Bhopal disaster in India, in 1984, was the world's worst chemical disaster Toxic gas leaked from the poorly maintained and understaffed plant owned by Union Carbide, killing up to 20, 000 people and leaving 120,000 chronically ill. – Greenpeace)

After the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986 resulted in 31 dead and forced the evacuation of 135,000, Bertell helped convene a tribunal to fight for the rights of those victims. (* * Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, April 26, 1986 - the routine 20-second shut down of the system seemed to be another test of the electrical equipment. But seven seconds later, a surge created a chemical explosion that released nearly 520 dangerous radionuclides into the atmosphere. The total power of the explosion was estimated to be more than 100 times that of the atomic weapons used in World War II. The force of the explosion spread contamination over large parts of the Soviet Union, now the territories of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. Had the other three RBMK blocks exploded, high-levels of radiation would have spread to the English Channel. According to official report, thirty-one people died immediately and 600,000 "liquidators," involved in fire fighting and clean-up operations, were exposed to the high doses of radiation. Based on the official report, near 8,400, 000 people in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia were exposed to the radiation, which is more than the population of Austria. About 155,000 sq. km of territories in the three countries were contaminated, which is almost half of the total territory of Italy. Agricultural areas covering nearly 52,000 sq. km, which is more than the size of Denmark, were contaminated with cesium-137 and strontium-90, with 30-year and 28-year half-lives respectively. Nearly 404,000 people were resettled but millions continued to live in an environment where continued residual exposure created a range of adverse effects. (17))

Dr. Rosalie Bertell

(photo: omitted)

She has written reports on everything from radiation-related health problems, experienced by the Rongelap people after bomb testing in the Marshall Islands, to the effects of the Pickering nuclear plant on the health of local children. In 1990, Bertell took on Ontario Hydro when it published "slick" booklets outlining a 25-year plan with no mention of potential health problems.

"We challenged them and ended up producing five volumes on what they should have known," says Bertell.

The "we" are Bertell and the 300 members of the International Institute of Concern for Public

Health, a hard-hitting environmental organization formed in 1984.

Bertell, who retired "in theory" in 1994, is currently president of the institute where her mission is to integrate influential people, with environmental concerns, into a cohesive force so that they can lobby governments as a block.

Bertell currently serves on the U.S.-Canada International Joint Commission Nuclear Task Force and is an adviser to Health Canada on the state of the Great Lakes. She has also worked on the relationship between diabetes, cancer and leukemia and radiation. And Bertell has a thought-provoking view of obesity.

"It's not just junk food. It's well-known that radioactive iodine in North American's atmosphere slows down the thyroid gland and that contributes to (being) overweight."

Bertell declares its all about money. "War and money make the world go around. When you have money, you have to be prepared to go to war to protect it and that is the main concern of corporations and governments."

This may sound cynical coming from a nun, but Bertell snaps, "Once your eyes are open, you can't dose them again."

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Guiding questions

1. The above articles deal with terrorism, materialism and public health hazards respectively. Identify the issue(s) of justice in each.
2. Of the three types of justice, which does each article above treat? Explain.
3. How do the arguments made by Roche, Leddy and Bertell connect to the teaching of the Church? Does one have to be Catholic to understand the Catholic Church teaching on justice? Why or why not?

Mary's Magnificat

Mary's song is a wonderful example of justice imbued with love. Mary sings about the God of the covenant who has come to bring a new order to the world, bringing down the powerful and raising the lowly. Mary rejoices in what God is about to do for her people.

My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour, For he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Luke 1.47-55

(photo: omitted)

Chapter review

Summary

Justice under the old covenant is about persons relating consciously to the needs of others in terms of their human dignity as created, loved and prized by God.

In the New Testament, God reveals the just and righteous one to be Jesus Christ. He is a model of how we are to live with and for others.

There are three types of relationships that undergird the notion of justice: Commutative justice: the relationship of one individual to another individual; Legal justice: the relationship of the individual to society or the state; Distributive justice: the relationship of society or the government to the individual

The Catholic Church brings the gospel perspective of justice to bear on all political and economic systems.

Private property is always to be seen in relation to all the goods of creation, which, in the final analysis, are to serve the needs of all.

Catholic teaching takes as a point of departure the common good. It says that individual goods ought to serve the common good.

The Catholic Church explicitly rejects belief in the automatic beneficence of market forces. It insists that the end result of market forces must be scrutinized, and if necessary corrected, in the name of natural law, social justice, human rights, and the common good.

Governments redistribute wealth within a society by means of taxes. As the U.S. bishops stated it, "The tax system should be structured according to the principle of progressivity so that those with relatively greater financial resources pay a higher rate of taxation. The inclusion of such a principle in tax policies is an important means of reducing the severe inequalities of income and wealth in the nation."

Through the parable of the landowner and the workers (Matthew 20.1-16), Jesus confronts our legalistic notion of what is right, a notion that misrepresents God's goodness. God's mercy surpasses all human measure and is not to be equated with strict human justice.

The Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Jesus asks us to interpret this rule in terms of generosity because God has been generous.

Review questions

Knowledge and understanding

1. Explain the distinctions between commutative, legal and distributive justice.
2. Summarize the key teaching of Jesus in the parable of the landowner and the workers (Matthew 20.1-16).

Thinking and inquiry

3. What is the Golden Rule, and how does Jesus interpret it?
4. Describe the relationship between the private good and the common good in Catholic social teaching.

Communication

5. Create a class portfolio of stories of people who live justly.
6. Create a Web site (or design one on paper) that addresses from a Catholic perspective a critical justice issue in your community.

Application

7. Explain how taxation can be used by a government to address a particular injustice in society.
8. Analyze "Spirit that matters" by Mary Jo Leddy for what it means to be people of justice.

Glossary

common good: "The sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily." (CCC, #1906)

economics: Originally referred to the household and its management. Generally used to refer to the system of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services in a society.

Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

justice: commutative: pertains to contractual relationships between individuals, and between institutions that have the legal status of a person; legal: the relationship of the individual to society, based on law and the enforcement of law;

distributive: the relationship of government to the individual, and the governments obligations

private property: Something that is owned for one's exclusive use, or for one's exclusive control.

righteous: Acting in accord with divine or moral law.

solidarity: Unity with and among people, based on common interests, values, principles.