

Launch Out Letter (LOL)

May 2020



Duquesne University

Covid-19 and Catholic social teaching

By Lisa Beech

During the Covid-19 pandemic, one question I have been reflecting on is what new insights and practical guidelines does Catholic social teaching bring to our long standing traditions of caring for the poor, sick and dying?

Care for the poor is part of the Jewish tradition, but Jesus brought new insights into the care of the sick, seeking out people regarded as untouchable, such as lepers. In the account of the healing of the blind man in John 9 he transformed assumptions that physical illnesses were a curse or an affliction sent by God to punish bad behaviour. In Matthew 25 his total identification with the sick was made clear: "I was sick and you took care of me." (Matthew 25:36)

The early Christians were noted for healing and tending to the sick, including selfless acts during smallpox and measles pandemics in the early centuries of Christianity. The rule of the Benedictine order from the fifth century required members of the order to care for the sick "above and before every other duty".

The tradition of the Corporal Works of Mercy, drawn primarily from Matthew 25, was put into words and art from the 12th century, and during the Middle Ages monasteries and convents became key medical centres in Europe. Religious orders such as the Franciscans were noted for their care for the sick and dying during times of plague, and in more recent centuries, religious institutes of both lay and vowed women and men were formed to bring healthcare to the sick, especially among the poorest. Individuals from Saint Elizabeth of Hungary to Saint Teresa of Calcutta are recognised by the Church as models for their care of the sick and dying. Sacramental rites and practices such as anointing the sick, and bringing communion to housebound people have become regular practices.



So against this background, it has become apparent from social media chat and commentary that many members of our modern day Catholic communities are confused and baffled by practices requested by health officials and agreed to by Church authorities not to gather, to bring communion to the sick or anointing to the sick and dying. How can we understand, and help our communities to understand, that this is equally part of our Catholic tradition?

What Catholic social teaching adds to our previous charitable practices is a deeper look at what our moral and ethical tradition brings to reflection on broader social and political questions. This modern body of writings called Catholic social teaching is often dated from Pope Leo's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which considered our responsibilities towards people impoverished by the terrible working conditions of the European industrial revolution. This recognised that poverty did not only result from natural disasters, workers' own behaviours and actions, or other forces beyond the control of individuals, but also from the behaviour and actions of other people – in this case, both the actions of unscrupulous employers but also governments who established laws which enabled exploitative practices.

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This tradition of looking critically at society and asking what our tradition brings to our actions has continued in both formal Catholic social teaching documents of the Church, but also in theological reflection among many different lay and religious groups. From this reflection, principles have been drawn which are important to understanding our current actions during the Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions.

Common good: We look for the common good of all, which includes the good of each individual but also the good of all of us together as society. Compared to the Christians of the early centuries or Middle Ages, we have the benefit of scientific knowledge, which helps us to understand how infections spread. Health advice tells us that rather than physically going out to people during an epidemic, the common good in this situation is best served by restricting movement. We do not want to become carriers of the virus, delivering infection with a food parcel or sacrament. In this situation, we protect others by isolating ourselves.

Human dignity: We value the lives of each member of society, as worth of respect because we are each made in the image and likeness of God. We reject commentary and perspectives heard during the Covid-19 crisis which values some members of society as more “productive” than others on the basis of their ability to participate in paid work.



We also have to note that past actions by churches as well as other members of society, where charitable action on behalf of the poor has not been accompanied by respect for people’s human dignity, has left a legacy in which the word “charitable” in the English language has a demeaning connotation for many people. It recalls instances of judgement and disempowerment, rather than of positive encouragement and accompaniment. Recognising human dignity requires us always to put the people we serve at the centre of our response, rather than at the peripheries of it.

Preferential option for the poor and vulnerable: While the Covid-19 virus does not discriminate between rich and poor, our response as a society still does. We need to recognise that the impacts of both the health and the coming economic crisis do not and will not fall equally on all members of society. Many have woken up to the importance of those “essential workers” of the lockdown – cleaners, supermarket workers, garbage collectors, delivery workers, homecare workers – who despite their essential role are often the lowest paid members of society, with insecure working conditions. We also recognise that there are members of society whose cupboards were bare before the lockdown and restricted movement conditions began, who have suffered real hunger and deprivation during this period. Reaching out to these groups, and advocating with and for them, is also part of our protection of the poor and vulnerable.

The texts and principles of Catholic social teaching build on our previous Catholic traditions and practices to bring new perspectives to age-old challenges of caring for the poor, the sick and the dying. Separation from the sacramental life of the Church has been painful for many Catholics, especially those going through sickness and end of life. However, assisting our communities to understand how our modern day response is true to our traditional practices is also part of our pastoral role.



Readers Digest

Happy Birthday!

Birthday blessings to *Cardinal John Dew* on 05 May and *Mary Ann Greaney* on 27 May 2020.

Updates

- We have cancelled our Retreat for 01-03 May at the Magnificat, Featherston.
- We need to come together for a Prayer Day or a re-schedule of the Retreat sometime June or July. I will give you the details once I am back at The Catholic Centre. It is important we do this before we get into the 08 August session on Theological Reflection with Anne Powell. Otherwise, it would be very hard for us to focus on such a heavy topic if that would be the first time we will be seeing each other. If you have a suggestions or reservations on any of the weekend dates on June and July, please do let me know.
- There are some of you would still like to do a Pastoral Project this year. I got the proposals of Jude, Margaret and Telesia. The rest would still like to push through but would have to re-consider their projects in the light of the post-lockdown realities. Whilst some would prefer to take this year for reflection. My take is - listen to the Spirit and what you are called to be and to do in this year. Deadlines for submissions would depend on each Candidate and I have personally discussed this with all of you. Please keep your mentor in the loop. If you decided to forego a Pastoral Project this year, please let me and your mentor know.
- Thanks to Margaret, I have drafted an Evaluation Form for our Pastoral Project, I have asked Susan Apathy and Mary-Ann Greaney to review and I am incorporating their feedback. I'll send you a copy in an email about the Pastoral Projects.

'For the times they are a-changing

By Chris Walkerdine

In these times of uncertainty the line '*For the times they are a-changin'*' has been playing round and round in my head. When I looked up the lyrics by Bob Dylan, I saw his song actually starts with the rallying call, "*Come gather 'round, people, Wherever you roam, And admit that the waters, Around you have grown ...*" For me this seems like a call to come together from far and wide - for there is strength in unity and diversity - and acknowledge that our world and how people are reacting, are changing dramatically. Among the new challenges that will arise is where do I fit and how can I be an evangelizing force in the new normal? Whatever the new normal is.

I'm grateful to Maya for encouraging me to do some further study through Boston College. This study has given me access to learned scholars who have challenged and enhanced my understanding of my faith. One of the lecturers Jane E Regan gave a presentation on "New Evangelisation for Today's Parish". She reminded us that everyone's perceived reality is defined by their perspective - their upbringing, core values, experiences etc., but that the reality we see is only ever a partial perspective. We need to see and hear other people's perspective to understand their reality and expand our perspective of reality. Reading the responses from virtual classmates are showing me different realities and giving me the opportunity to start practising the sharing of how and why my faith is important to me. Another lecturer, Susan Timoney in her presentation "Nurturing the Evangelizing Encounter with the Laity", commented that Catholics are good at showing their faith but not so good at explaining to others how their faith enriches their lives.

Being blessed with the opportunity to go to Kuala Lumpur last year for an Alpha Leadership Conference, opened new doors for evangelizing on a bigger scale. The Alpha programme has the potential to help re-energise parishes and transform lives. It has three core components, building relationships and community through a weekly shared meal, sharing information by watching a video all together and thirdly, moving into small discussion groups where participants are encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings - their perceived reality. No prior knowledge is required, everyone is welcome. It is not a time for answering questions or giving church dogma. The logistics of supplying meals, setting up tables, dishes washed, videos organised and so on, every week for ten weeks means having teams of helpers from the parish involved, working together to achieve common goals. Alpha also offers the option to keep meeting regularly after the programme. This allows the feeling of community to continue to strengthen and it also creates ongoing opportunities for further formation, maybe enrolling in RCIA or other programmes running in your parish.



Whether it's through your work, your monthly book group, helping at the local school fair or more formal programmes like Alpha, you have opportunities every day to be evangelists by your actions and if questioned by your words. In the Papal document *Evangelii Nuntiandi* it states "The Church exists in order to evangelize." (14) Evangelizing for me is about sharing this joyous, beautiful faith with others in a way that they can connect with, so they want to be a part of this great faith community. The challenge is to walk along-side people I interact with in everyday life and listen and see their reality. Then I may be able to see and utilise the opportunities that come along which will help them see how their world will be enriched by including a relationship with God. "... *And keep your eyes wide, The chance won't come again..., For the times they are a-changin'*"

Lockdown Reflections

I have asked some members of the Launch Out Community to give their insights on the challenges, lessons learned and reflective questions they gathered from their lockdown experience. Here are selected excerpts of what they shared:

Challenges

- * Recognising that I cannot do all that is needed so I have to prioritise – *Mary Ann Greaney*
- * Missing our normal staff gathering for morning tea, lunches and face-to-face meetings - *Mika Teofilo*
- * How to make our liturgies and the opportunity for formation and inner growth a reality - *Kitty McKinley*
- * Adapting to being at home and trying not to feel you are on call 24/7 – *Chris Walkerdine*
- * The fear of not reaching those most in need through lack of awareness or lack of resources – *Barbara Rowley*
- * Finding time to meditate and be still - *Catherine Gibbs*
- * Setting up office at home with relevant technology...-- *Sharon Penny*
- * Managing people's expectations—*Debbie Matheson*

Lessons Learned

- * ...I'm surprised at how rarely I manage to achieve my long-held dream of a daily walk down to the sea to greet the rising sun; to smell, feel and hear the glory of creation, rather than simply thinking about it. --- *Margaret Bearsley*
- * A key one has been learning to trust more in God's providence. Astonishing things happened by trusting that things would work out and always for the best - *Catherine Gibbs*
- * People are connecting in ways that they would not have thought of before the pandemic, and connecting more often - *Joe Green*
- * Nothing is taken for granted - *Mika Teofilo*
- * A new realisation of interdependence within all of creation. --- *Barbara Rowley*
- * A sense of humour is key -- *Sharon Penny*

Reflective Questions

- * When the restrictions are lifted, what changes do we need to make in the way we live our lives and the way we are 'church'? -- *Mary Ann Greaney*
- * What does pastoral leadership (lay and clergy) mean in a time like this? -- *Maya Bernardo*
- * How can we harness the energy, new sense and understanding of connectedness and activities that have arisen during lockdown? -- *Debbie Matheson*
- * How can we make our church more relevant to the lives of the people? - *Kitty McKinley*



Catholic Diocese of Christchurch

Prayers for those who departed during lockdown

We pray in a special way for the victims of Covid-19 and those of us who lost family, relatives and friends during this time of Lockdown. Especially those who passed away alone or separated from family.

More on Theological Reflection- Diving into the human experience

Maya Bernardo

This is a follow up on the article on the March issue where I gave an overview of Theological Reflection (TR). In this essay, I'll try to present an overall picture of the TR process and underpin the value of diving deeply into the human experience.

Patricia O' Connell Killen and John De Beer (1994) in their book "The Art of Theological Reflection" described TR as bringing into dialogue experience and Christian Tradition. In this essay, we will define Tradition as Scripture and Church teaching. Mindful, that Christian Tradition is in fact drawn from Scripture; and that Church Teaching is also a product of human experience. Hence, as much as for purposes of attempting to present a rubric of TR, we do recognise the interconnected of Scripture, Church Teaching and Human Experience.

Killen and de Beer provided a 5-step process for doing TR. Below is a table that list down those stages and some reflective questions that could represent what we could be reflecting on a specific stage. The entire process happens within prayer.

Theological Reflection	Reflective Questions	P R A Y E R
<i>Stage 1:</i> Focusing on some aspect of the experience	What is an experience I would like to reflect on? Why is this experience important to me?	
<i>Stage 2:</i> Describing that experience to identify the heart of the matter	What happened? How did it happen? How am I feeling? How is my body reacting to this experience?	
<i>Stage 3:</i> Exploring the heart of the matter in conversation with the wisdom of Christian heritage	Where is God in this experience? Where does this issue sit in the light of the Church's teaching? What Scripture passage speaks to this experience? What is the context of the Scripture or Church Teaching that spoke to my experience?	
<i>Stage 4:</i> Identifying from the conversation the truths and meaning for living	What is my bold question to God? Waiting for God's answer—silence, contemplation	
<i>Stage 5:</i> Acting on Insight	What am I called to do? Waiting/silence—prayer/contemplation Once an action is identified, you can subject this to a more practical refinement (objectives, when, what, where, how)	

Stages 1 and 2 are probably the hardest stages and one which would determine the quality of our TR. Identifying our issues, mostly one that disturb and cause us great pain; to sit with it, is an uncomfortable place to be. The temptation is to quickly jump to Stage 3, or straight to Stage 5 where we can say something impressive and safe. Killen and De Beer raised useful pointers on what it means to enter (or re-enter if we are recalling) our experience.

- It requires practicing the discipline of narrating what has happened to us as fully as possible.
- We honour ourselves and our companions in reflection by accepting non-judgmentally the reality of the experience. This means being aware and avoiding the words "should", "ought", "if only", etc. We withhold the judgments, withhold self-berating or self-congratulatory beliefs and simply attend to the event.
- The question that need to be suspended is "why" (this happened). Answering "why" calls for an interpretation. It prematurely distances us from the event by rationalising what happened. This short-circuits the revelatory power of the experience. God cannot speak to us if we refuse to be present—non-judgmentally aware and attentive to our experience.

Neil Darragh, a well-known Kiwi-theologian, emphasises that in doing theology, the person suspends bringing God into the picture too quickly, as it will thwart the reflection process. The notion of God itself presupposes a prescription of the outcome. The theologian Karl Rahner resists the separation for the secular with the sacred and insist that God is the mystery of the human experience. This means, if one must know God, one must enter the fullness of humanity; going deep into the muck of experience and the ordinariness of daily lives, to discover God's presence—God is in the details, and those details are manifested through feelings Killen and De Beer extensively explained the importance of feelings as a resource of our TR, but mindful that they are not the destination. When we enter into our experience, we suspend our need for easy and feel-good answers. This is where the accompaniment of an experienced spiritual director is important because it would be hard to do this on our own.

Theological reflection brings into dialogue our experience with Christian Tradition. In the absence of a genuine dive into the human experience, we could easily resort to moralising or exerting great effort to protect and justify Tradition. This tendency often leads to the politicisation of Tradition, with the rivalry of the “conservatives” or protectors of Tradition and the “progressives” who aims to challenge Tradition. The crux of the matter is that the Christian Tradition is dynamic and ever evolving. In the book by Chris Lowney (2013) on the leadership of Pope Francis, he says that Francis has the uncanny ability to respect and revere Tradition whilst living in the present moment and using this as a way of looking towards the future. He quotes Francis as saying: “Fidelity is always a change, a blossoming, a growth”. Killen and DeBeer puts it succinctly:

“Our lives and the tradition are intimately linked. If we honestly look at our lives, they lead us to tradition. If we openly enter the tradition, it leads us to our lives.”

We can use our present experience of the lockdown to apply this principle; or we may already be doing it. After all, our current experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has actually changed the way we do Church (Tradition).

It is possible that the starting point of the TR is Scripture or a Church Teaching. I suppose there are many ways of doing TR. However, any approach would rely on how much we could render ourselves vulnerable to the presence of God through our experiences. Laying bare our nakedness and sitting with the discomfort of our pains and questions is a gift of Grace. Grace that we need to ask over and over again-- that we not only be honest with God and ourselves, but we do not shy away from the loving gaze of God.



Received from an email of Catherine Gibbs



When he had finished eating, he said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch”.

Luke 5: 4