

**CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING &
LEADERSHIP FOR A JUST WORKPLACE**
Seminar Presentation for the
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**A MESSAGE FOR ALL
EMPLOYERS**

Catholic Social Teaching sums up the teaching of the Church on matters of justice in society. Questions involving employment relations have been prominent in the development of these teachings.

In 1891 the first of the modern social encyclicals, *Rerum Novarum*, focused on the plight of industrial workers, and ever since then employment relations have been seen as the 'key' to a just society.

If we wish to speak credibly to our community about justice in employment relations, it is important that we be witnesses to the values and principles which we espouse. The Catholic Church is one of the largest employers in the country, so we have a unique opportunity to influence employment relations through our own practice. The challenge is to provide abundant examples of best practice rather than doing whatever we are legally entitled to and simply preaching to others as though our words do not apply to us as employers.

Leadership for a just workplace means leading by example.

**EMPLOYERS, PASTORS
OR MANAGERS?**

Perhaps part of the challenge is the fact that we don't always see our selves as employers.

It is not uncommon for church people to understand their relationships in pastoral terms or in terms of communion, community or mission rather than in terms of an employment relationship. It's not a

matter of either or but rather both and. For example, I am an employee of the Australian Province of the Society of Jesus, and we have legal obligations towards one another arising from this employment relationship. This is in no way at odds with the fact that lay people like me are companions with the Jesuits in a shared mission. Our connection is not simply an employment relationship, it involves a common commitment and a shared spirituality, but it also includes an employment relationship. The relationship is multi dimensional.

If you supervise someone else's work, or if you pay anyone to do any work for you, then the Church's teachings about the rights and duties of employers apply to you.

Today Pastors are almost always employers as well. Formation to enable leaders to meet both their pastoral responsibilities and their legal responsibilities as employers is needed, and I congratulate CCER on their efforts in this area.

Sometimes, in an effort to improve professionalism, Church agencies will hire managers with business experience. While this can be useful and appropriate, simply applying business practices to church based not for profit activities is also problematic. Formation to ensure that all managers understand and implement church teaching on social justice and especially employment relations is needed too.

PRACTICAL MORALITY

As part of the field of applied moral theology, Catholic Social Teaching, is very practical. It is not just a collection of formal teaching documents but rather a body of thought and experience that helps us to discern how we will act in real world situations.

Firstly I will explore how Catholic Social Teaching connects with strategic planning and needs to be integrated into whole life of Catholic organizations. Then I will note some of the key messages for employers in Catholic Social Teaching concerning the employment relationship.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING & STRATEGIC PLANNING

One of the key tasks of leaders in organizations is strategic planning, and Catholic Social Teaching should be part of this process.

Catholic Social Teaching grounds the vision, mission and goals of Catholic organizations, providing the inspiration and guiding values for their work. Through its principles for reflection and criteria for judgment, Catholic Social Teaching underpins their strategies, policies and practices, and it guides the setting of priorities and the concrete positions that they adopt.

Vision, Mission & Goals

Catholic Social Teaching calls us to promote a more just society, reminding us of the essential place that work to promote the justice of God's Reign in our world holds in the mission of the Church, and in the mission of each Christian. It often provides the inspiration for the work of church organizations, for example religious institutes established schools to provide education for the children of the poor and health care facilities for those in need.

Catholic Social Teaching proposes principles for reflection which help us to name and explain the key values that guide us. These ground the vision, mission and goals of Catholic organizations and social justice groups.

The key principles of Catholic Social Teaching are human dignity, the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity, and the fundamental social values that it promotes are truth, justice, freedom and love.

Let's take a moment to look briefly at each of the key principles as we will be referring to them repeatedly.

Human Dignity

The principle of human dignity reminds us that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God and has an inalienable and transcendent human dignity which gives rise to human rights. It is the bedrock of all Catholic social ethics.

It follows that people are always more important than things. People must never be treated as a means or an instrument to be used for the benefit of another. Employees are never just suppliers of labour, an input to the production process.

Every human person is equal in dignity and rights. Every human community, every race and culture is

equal in dignity and rights. The human family is one because we are all children of the one God. This aspect of human dignity is sometimes referred to as the principle of the unity of the human family.

One way in which we can reflect and express this principle in employment relations is to have clear policies against discrimination in employment on the basis of race, sex, or disability regardless of whether we are bound by the relevant legislation or not.

The Common Good

The principle of the common good reminds us that we are all really responsible for each other – we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers - and must work for social conditions which ensure that every person and every group in society is able to meet their needs and realize their potential.

It follows that every group in society must take into account the rights and aspirations of other groups, and of the well being of the whole human family.

Related to this is the principle of the universal destination of goods - God intended the goods of creation for the use of all, and so everyone has a right to access the goods of creation to meet their needs.

One way in which we can honour this principle in employment relations is to establish processes that explicitly take into account the rights, needs, and legitimate aspirations of all stake holders rather than simply pursuing narrow self interest or exploiting whatever market power we might have.

Subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity concerns how participation and decision making should be organized. Responsibility should be kept as close as possible to the grassroots. The people or groups most directly affected by a decision or policy should have a key decision making role.

More encompassing groups should only intervene to support smaller, more local groups in case of need, and where this is necessary in order to coordinate their activities with the activities of other groups in order to promote the common good. It is from this aspect of help offered by larger to smaller groups that the term subsidiarity (from the Latin *subsidium* for help or assistance) comes.

This principle leads us to questions such as the level at which negotiation about employment agreements should take place. For example, can workers effectively negotiate for a just wage and safe and healthy working conditions at the enterprise level, or do they need the assistance of unions and broader

agreements in order to effectively pursue their interests and achieve horizontal equity?

Solidarity

The principle of solidarity reminds us that human beings are social by nature. We cannot survive without others and can only grow and achieve our potential in relationship with others. We are made in the likeness of a Trinitarian God – a community of persons in perfect relationship.

God is community and makes community. It follows that our salvation is bound up with that of each other. Solidarity can also be understood as a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good.

This principle reminds us of the broad network of relationships in which we have responsibilities. One way in which we can honour this principle in employment relations is by recognising and rewarding team work rather than focussing narrowly on individual performance and contracts.

If Catholic Social Teaching principles do in fact ground the vision, mission and goals of an organisation, this will be reflected in its employment relations. To check your vision, mission and goals against these principles can provide a simple short hand way of checking if you are on track.

Policies, Practices & Strategies

Catholic Social Teaching also guides how we, as individuals and as organisations, go about our work. It influences how we do what we do, or, as the Jesuits like to say, ‘our way of proceeding’, for example some Catholic social service agencies have not been prepared to accept employment services contracts for the Federal Government because of the way in which they would be required to treat people in certain circumstances.

Catholic Social Teaching proposes criteria for judgment which promote certain patterns of behaviour that contribute to establishing the ethos and culture of a Catholic group or organization. It suggests an incarnational path, seeking and finding God in people, places and events, and an inductive methodology which starts from experience – what is happening to people - rather than theory or legal requirements.

If we are guided by Catholic Social Teaching, our ways of acting will be respectful of the principle of subsidiarity. We will adopt a wholistic view of the human person in community, and our ways of going

about things will express solidarity. The ultimate measure of our work will be the extent to which it respects, protects and promotes human dignity.

All of the policies, practices and strategies of an organisation should be consistent with and help to advance its vision, mission and goals. They should embody the values and philosophy of the organisation. If these are grounded by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, then Catholic Social Teaching will underpin the strategies, policies and practices of the organization.

Given the strong emphasis placed on human dignity in Catholic Social Teaching, employment policies and practices will be a litmus test of the Catholicity of an organisation’s approach.

Positions & Priorities

Catholic Social Teaching influences the substance of our work. It guides us in choosing the positions we adopt, what we will do, and how we set priorities.

The principles of human dignity, the common good and solidarity will guide us in deciding which issues and situations require our response. They are touchstones in the development of our positions, and they guide us in prioritizing, or ranking, the relative importance of different issues and tasks.

The principle of subsidiarity will guide decisions about the concerns and tasks which are appropriate to particular actors. It helps us to discern whether a particular task or issue would be best addressed by our group, or by smaller, more local group, or perhaps by a larger more overarching group that can coordinate efforts more effectively.

Catholic Social Teaching guides the priorities of Catholic organizations and groups, as well as the substance of the positions that they adopt on issues.

KEY MESSAGES FOR LEADERS

We have seen how the key principles Catholic Social Teaching connect with the strategic planning of Catholic organizations, now to some specifics on the key messages for leaders on employment relations.

As well as reflecting on matters in the light of the key principles of Catholic Social Teaching, we can also examine how teaching authorities within the Church have read and responded to concrete issues

over time in the light of these teachings. There is a body of official teachings at the international level (the universal social magisterium) which we can draw on to access the learnings of our tradition through time, and there are also more specific teachings by local Bishops, as well as guidelines for action which are sometimes issued by local Bishops directly, or through their agencies.

The major documents focusing on work are *Rerum Novarum* (Leo XIII, 1891) and *Laborem Exercens* (John Paul II, 1981). A good, brief, summary of these teachings is included in the Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations document *The Catholic Church as an Employer in Australia Today* (http://www.accer.asn.au/docs/pdfs/p_thechurch.pdf published in 2002) and Chapter six of the Pontifical Council for Justice & Peace's *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* spells out these teachings in somewhat more detail.

Rather than summarizing the whole body of teaching on work, I will highlight what I believe to be the key messages for leaders in Catholic organizations in their capacity as employers.

Rights of Workers

The first thing to note is that the teachings have consistently focused on workers and their rights rather than on employers. In *Rerum Novarum* Leo XIII noted that the concern of the Church and the intervention of the state should be directed to the rights of workers because the employers were more able to protect their own interests in these matters.

The first duty of Catholic employers in employment relations then is to respect and protect the rights of workers.

In *Laborem Exercens* n 19 – 20 Pope John Paul II rehearses the list of workers' rights commonly recognized in the teachings. They include: the right to a just wage; the right to rest from work; a safe and healthy work environment; income support when unemployed; pensions and/or insurance for old age, sickness and work related accidents; social security connected with maternity; the right to assemble and to form associations; the right to act collectively for the just demands of workers; the right, as a last resort, to strike.

The safeguarding of some of these rights is not directly or exclusively the responsibility of employers. John Paul introduced the concept of the 'indirect employer' to acknowledge "many different factors, other than the direct employer, that exercise

a determining influence on the shaping both of the work contract and, consequently, of just or unjust relationships in the field of human labour" (LE, n 16)

Church employers are not completely free to construct employment relations exactly as they please. These constraints are not to be passively accepted - the Church also has a responsibility to influence the 'indirect employer'.

The Priority of Labour

In the post industrial, post Cold War context employment relations issues are less likely to be seen as a conflict between labour and capital than they once were. The traditional teaching that labour always has priority over capital might more usefully be expressed for today as 'people are always more important than things'. The dignity and rights of people are more important than profit or other key performance indicators.

A challenge for Catholic employers is to develop key performance indicators which incorporate values such as respect for the dignity and rights of employees and other stakeholders. If we treat people badly in our single minded focus on our organizational mission, can this mission really be a participation in the mission of Jesus?

The Value of Work

John Paul II frequently emphasized the dignity of work and the preeminence of the subjective dimension of work over its objective dimension. The value of work is grounded in the fact that it is the free act of a human person rather than being determined primarily by what is produced or the market value of the work done (LE n 6). Work is for people, not people for work (LE n 6).

This teaching is deeply counter cultural. We should respect and value the cleaner and their work as much as we respect and value the CEO and their work. This doesn't require that the two have the same remuneration, but it does challenge us to consider how we deal with different categories of employees.

Collective Action

The teachings on work strongly and consistently affirm the role of worker's associations – trade unions – in acting for the rights and legitimate interests of workers. We would be seriously betraying our tradition if we seized upon the Work

Choices legislation as an opportunity to avoid or limit collective negotiations and agreements with employees.

Of course the capacity of unions to abuse their power is also acknowledged by the teachings: they should not be vehicles for class struggle; they should take into account the limitations posed by the general economic situation of the country; they should not act like political parties or be too closely associated with a political party; and they should not abuse the right to strike (LE, n 20).

Work / Life Balance

On the seventh day, God rested. We need time to rest, to nurture our family and community relationships, to participate in cultural life, political life, to enjoy recreation, and to nurture our spiritual life individually and communally. It is not sufficient to have time off work to rest; it must be organized in such a way as to enable us to participate in family and community life and to make our religious observance (LE n 19). We need time away from work together at the same time.

More flexible work arrangements could mean a better work / life balance for employees, but the general experience has been that labour market flexibilization has led to less certainty and regularity for many workers. How good are Catholic employers at using these arrangements to help support family and community life? Do our practices match our rhetoric about the importance of family life?

CONCLUSION

Catholic employers have legal responsibilities, but they also have moral and ethical responsibilities which may ask more than that which is legally required.

Catholic Social Teaching offers principles for reflection and criteria for judgment which can inform strategic planning, including the development of policies, procedures and practices governing employment relations. The tradition also offers guidelines for action on employment relations. These teachings apply to Catholic organizations as much as to the community at large.

It is the role of leaders in Catholic organizations to ensure the alignment of practice with the social justice tradition of the church. By witnessing to this tradition Catholic organizations can exert significant influence on employment relations in Australia.

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