

Monastic Scribe XVI: December 3, 2021

ONE FOR ALL AND ALL FOR ONE!

I have lived in different countries during my life. As much as I loved Italy, Ireland, Canada and other countries, I always realized, after a while, how American I am. It is just in my bones, my values, my expectations. But I also came to appreciate the particular customs and values that other cultures enshrine. We can learn from others and that begins in acknowledging everything isn't perfect in the USA. In the present time of great turmoil, division and polarization in our country, I believe our churches should be more vocal in claiming the people and situations that can be addressed by the social justice foundations of all our faith traditions.

Catholics, among others, have embraced in large numbers the individualism, consumerism, the fear and the anger that are so prevalent in our country. Religion for many is a totally private affair. Go to church on Sunday. Support the Church. Pursue selective teachings of the church, such as the condemnation of abortion.

Meanwhile other Catholic beliefs and practices are neglected, even opposed. A saying goes around that "Catholic Social Doctrine" is the best kept secret of Catholicism. Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore and other Catholic leaders in the nineteenth centuries, however, fought for the rights of the working person, opposed child labor, promoted a living wage, encouraged all Catholics to care for the poor, the sick, the immigrant. I am not an historian but I wonder whether the post World War II break up of inner city parishes, the move to the suburbs, and greater affluence haven't also abetted the development of a more individual Catholic identity and spirituality.

I hear objections about the church getting into politics. Catholics, however, do care about politics and the morality that is involved in political decisions. This is different from partisan politics and the embrace, by a priest or preacher, of a particular political position of a political party. But Catholics must speak up about racism, climate crisis, poverty, health care, immigrants, warfare and nuclear armament as well as abortion because these are all moral issues.

Some think the emergence of the Catholic Social Doctrine started with the 1890 encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, and was later developed by Popes Pius XI, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and more recently by Benedict XVI and Francis. But all these picked up the ancient tradition of what our faith is really about.

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From our Jewish forebears we learned the importance of caring for widows, orphans, resident aliens, the poor and hungry. Jesus followed all these teachings with his focus on care and love for each other.

His teachings largely concern matters of justice, avoidance of greed and selfishness. Check out the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and the Last Judgement Scene in Matt. 25 for strong words on the requirements of justice. The history of Christianity shows numerous writings and sermons that applied Jesus' teachings to each century.

What are the salient points of social doctrine? There is, first of all, respect for all life. To be pro-life is to care about all life from the cradle to the grave, as well as the life of animals and the planet. To respect people means seeing all people as children of God, not defaming them or calling them names. Every human being,

pre-natal, poor and rich, old and imprisoned, black and white, Muslim and Jew is our neighbor as Francis pointed out in his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, (on "Fraternity and Social Friendship"). His second chapter of that document is a meditation on the Good Samaritan and is a loving picture of our common bonds with all humanity. The third chapter is on immigrants and I was touched by how Francis always sees immigrants as people, before they are problems.

If respect for all life is primary, a second requisite of social justice is care for the common good. Sometimes our private, individual rights must cede to the common good. Our reason for denying the wearing of masks, getting vaccinated, etc., cannot just be because the government is requiring it and I have my rights! Rather, I must ask whether agreeing to accept the rule is good for the common good.

There are other social principles that Catholic Doctrine teaches, such as subsidiarity, respect for all creation, human rights of all peoples, respecting the truth in word and action. But the above is enough to rock the boat and get us thinking. Am I Catholic in my thinking? Any thoughts? Drop me a line at joycet@glastonburyabbey.org

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.